

**FÓRSA**

# HEALTH & WELFARE DIVISION

REPORT  
**2023**



# Contents

## Organisation.....4

Divisional Executive Committee (DEC).....	4
Divisional Council Meetings .....	4
National Professional Committees and Equivalent Grade Committee .....	4
Staffing .....	5
Acknowledgements .....	5

## National Health Office biennial report .....6

Health & Welfare divisional strategy .....	6
Regional Health Areas (RHAs) .....	6
Recruitment: Outsourcing dispute.....	7
Pension delays .....	7
Community and Voluntary sector pay restoration (Section 39, 56 and 10) .....	8
National Joint Council (NJC) .....	8
Blended working .....	9
Pandemic special recognition payment .....	9
Special leave with pay: Long Covid .....	9
Domestic abuse policy and paid leave .....	9
Menstrual and menopausal health policies .....	10
Job evaluation scheme .....	10
Recruitment and reform .....	10
Chief HSCP campaign .....	10
Community Healthcare Model (CHN) .....	10
Career pathway review .....	11
Children's disability network teams .....	11
Hospital pharmacy technicians .....	11

## Profession/grade-specific updates .....13

Audiology .....	13
Clinical Biochemistry .....	13
Clinical measurement physiologists .....	13
National Counselling Service .....	13
Peer support workers.....	13
Psychology .....	13
Safeguarding.....	14
HSCP alliance and engagement with professional bodies and associations.....	14
Tusla Transformation Programme .....	14
Tusla practice support officer.....	14
Tusla job evaluation .....	14
Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) .....	15
Tusla on-call rates .....	15

## Other group claims .....16

Standardisation of on-call (intellectual disability sector) .....	16
HSE: Serious physical assault scheme .....	16
Home support services .....	16

## Corporate Services.....17

eHealth and disruptive technology .....	17
IFMS .....	17
Payroll .....	17
Environmental health officers (EHOs) .....	17
Internal audit.....	18
Healthcare audit .....	18
Civil registration .....	18
Dental services .....	18

# Contents

## Incomes .....19

Public Service Pay - Building Momentum review .....	19
Collective bargaining .....	20
'Haddington Road' hours .....	21
Social dialogue .....	21
Childcare .....	22
Statutory sick pay .....	22
Travel and subsistence .....	22
A social wage .....	22
Domestic violence leave .....	23
Work Life Balance Bill.....	23

## Communications .....24

Media relations.....	24
Membership communications.....	24
Digital strategy .....	24
Campaigns unit .....	25
Skills Academy training.....	26

## Strategic organising ..... 27

Strategic organising.....	27
Equivalent Grades Committee .....	27

## Appendices .....28

Appendix 1: Health and Welfare Division strategy aligned to Fórsa strategic plan.....	29
Appendix 2: Health sector consolidated salary scales.....	30

# Organisation

## Divisional Executive Committee (DEC)

The following members were elected to the DEC at the conference in May 2021 for a two-year term:

- Cathaoirleach: Clodagh Kavanagh, Cork Health and Local Government Branch
- Leas Cathaoirleach: Andrew Meaney, Waterford Health and Local Government Branch
- DEC and NEC: Jarlath O'Connor, Mayo Health and Local Government Branch
- DEC and NEC: Bernie Mooney, Dublin South Health and Welfare Branch
- DEC and NEC: Corrine Phelan (elected to NEC July 2022), Galway Health and Local Government Branch
- DEC and NEC: Daniel Sweeney, Donegal Health and Local Government Branch
- DEC and NEC: Chris Harrison (stepped down June 2022), Kildare Health Branch
- DEC, Stephen Broderick, Dublin Hospitals Branch
- DEC, Helen Canning, Boards and Voluntary Agencies Branch
- DEC, Orla Carroll, Kilkenny Health and Local Government
- DEC, Paula Cregg, Clare Health and Local Government Branch
- DEC, Michael Davis, Dublin North Health and Welfare Branch
- DEC, Pat Fallon, Sligo Health and Local Government Branch
- DEC, Patricia Mellsop, Offaly Health and Local Government Branch
- DEC, Padraig O'Brien, Dublin Care Services Branch
- DEC, Piarias Ryan (commenced June 2022), Limerick Health and Welfare Branch.

Chris Harrison resigned from his position on the DEC in June 2022, as he took up the position of Industrial Relations Officer within Fórsa from July 2022. As a vacancy arose on the executive, under Rule 19 (e) Mr. Piarias Ryan took up the position from July 2022.

## Divisional Council meetings

Hybrid meetings continue to increase accessibility and participation in the meetings and Fórsa acknowledges the commitment from all branches within the division in ensuring the council meetings are well attended and engaging.

## National Professional Committees and Equivalent Grade Committee

There are several active National Professional Committees within the Health & Welfare Division. Some are long established, and others have re-formed in the last 12 months/are in the process of reforming.

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| ▪ Clinical Engineering            | ▪ Physiotherapy                         |
| ▪ Clinical Measurement Physiology | ▪ Podiatry                              |
| ▪ Counsellor Therapist            | ▪ Psychology                            |
| ▪ Dietitians                      | ▪ Social Care Work                      |
| ▪ Dental Surgeons                 | ▪ Social Work                           |
| ▪ Environmental Health Officers   | ▪ Speech and Language Therapy           |
| ▪ Occupational Therapy            | ▪ Hospital Pharmacy (HPAI)              |
|                                   | ▪ Hospital Pharmacy Technicians (NAHPT) |



## Divisional Executive Committee



From left to right (back row): Denise Keane, Orla Carroll, Patricia Mellsop, Corinne Phelan, Ashley Connolly, Linda Kelly, Pat Fallon, Stephen Broderick, Gary Hearne, Piarais Ryan, Bernie Mooney.

From left to right (front row): Daniel McSweeney, Clodagh Kavanagh, Jarlath O'Connor, Paula Cregg.

Absent from photo: Chris Cully, Helen Canning, Andy Meaney, Michael Davis, Pdraig O'Brien.

In addition, the division has representatives on the Equivalent Grade Committee (IV-VII). The purpose of this committee is discussed further in the Strategic Organising section of this report (see page 27).

The role and responsibilities of National Professional Committees/Equivalent Grade Committees are set out in the Fórsa Rulebook under Rule 25.



Chris Cully is assistant general secretary with a national remit for several areas within the Health and Welfare division including TUSLA, the Health Sector National Joint Council and the Social Worker and Social Care Worker National Professional Committees.



Denis Keane is assistant general secretary with national responsibility for corporate services within the HSE.

## Staffing

National Health Office, from 1st July 2022



Ashley Connolly is national secretary and Head of the Health and Welfare Division.



Linda Kelly is national secretary with responsibility for HSCP, pharmacy and statutory regulation in the Health and Welfare division.

## Acknowledgements

The work outlined in this biennial report also encompasses the trojan effort of former members of the National Health Office team- Éamonn Donnelly, Catherine Keogh, Adam O'Maolagáin, Diarmaid Mac Abhaird and Gary Hearne. Our thanks to them for their commitment in progressing these issues. We are also incredibly grateful to our administrative teams who work closely with the four of us (Justin Dunne, Sheena Clarke, Jade Kane and Carol Nevin) and to the wider administrative teams, industrial and organising staff based in Dublin and our regional offices for all their assistance.

# National Health Office biennial report

## Health & Welfare divisional strategy

In June 2022, the Health and Welfare Divisional Executive Committee approved the strategy 'Influencing a brighter future 2022-2024', underpinned by the motions to divisional conference in 2021. The strategy sets out the goals and vision for the Health and Welfare division of Fórsa and how we will meet the challenges being experienced in the health sector while achieving better outcomes for the wide variety of workers that we represent.

The strategy has been widely circulated and guides the work of the National Health Office and the Divisional Executive as well as our 34 health and welfare branches. It also underpins our commitment to the overall Fórsa strategic plan 2021-2025. A summary of how the two strategic plans are interconnected is included in Appendix 1.

This biennial report sets out in detail the work undertaken since the last divisional conference to achieve our ambitious strategy, and focus heavily on 'delivering for members', the second strand of the Fórsa strategic plan.

In addition to delivering for members, the division is also focused on:

- Organising to create a stronger, more powerful union
- We have agreed growth targets at divisional level and have developed materials to support branches to recruit potential members
- Campaigning and influencing
- Continue to engage with key political decision makers on issues affecting our members in the Division e.g. presenting to relevant Joint Oireachtas Committee members

- Building an efficient and effective union
- Continually reviewing and improving communications
- Ensuring new workplace reps have access to monthly Fórsa 101
- Futureproofing Fórsa for the challenges ahead
- Engaging with various external stakeholders to conduct high quality research to underpin our industrial and organising agenda e.g. TASC/ Chief HSCP Position paper and others.

Following the divisional conference in May 2023, and upon review of the motions carried by members, the Divisional Executive will review the strategy again and present an updated strategy to the Divisional Council in September.

## Regional Health Areas (RHAs)

Fórsa and the other health unions have received two presentations to date from the HSE RHA implementation team. Contained within the program for government is a commitment that we will move to this structure from 1st January 2024.

It's envisaged the Department of Health will retain responsibility for setting health policy and retain an oversight role. The HSE National will support regional health areas, ensuring consistency and national frameworks and models of care, they will also design national service requirement and standards and will monitor and assure performance of the RHAs.

The aim of RHAs is to focus on frontline professionals delivering the right care in the right place at the right time. The focus will be on the operational planning and delivery of primary, community and hospital health and social care

services at regional level, so that decisions can be made about specific delivery models closer to the service itself. Each RHA will have autonomy over – and accountability for – the delivery of services, outputs and outcomes for patients, service users, their families, and local communities.

From quarter one 2023, the implementation plan will emerge and be a key priority for the national health team and the Divisional Executive over the coming months.



Fórsa acknowledges the many issues that remain outstanding since the formation of the hospital groups and community health areas, and we will continue to engage with each group to seek to find solutions before we enter a further restructuring of the health service.

It's envisaged that post conference, we will be engaging directly with our branches and members across the country so you can have your say on the impending changes that may affect you.

## Recruitment: Outsourcing dispute

Fórsa has continued to engage with HSE management on the current over-reliance on agency staff to fill vacant posts in the HSE. There are very clear agreements in place, and Fórsa has continually maintained that the HSE should use direct labour to the greatest extent possible.

In the union's exchange of correspondence management reaffirmed its commitment to direct employment and adherence to our collective agreements. Despite this engagement the situation continued to deteriorate. Fórsa members are extremely proactive and have provided multiple examples of recruitment campaigns that breach our collective agreements. What's abundantly clear from any analysis of the advertised job posts is that the HSE remains focused on increasing the number of agency workers.

Fórsa's Health and Welfare DEC considered this and, at its meeting in April 2023, unanimously sanctioned a ballot for industrial action. The union will therefore commence a process of engagement with members around the country following the divisional conference in May.

## Pension delays

Regular meetings have taken place between the union and management to address the extensive delays some members experience in drawing down their pensions upon retirement.

These delays are not acceptable to Fórsa and the union has sought an extensive workforce plan from management to ensure these areas are sufficiently resourced. In addition to this, retired members are only receiving the pay awards due under Building Momentum in May 2023. These continued delays cannot continue and will remain a key focus of the division in the short term.



## Community and Voluntary sector pay restoration (Section 39, 56 and 10)

Members in four Section 39 agencies participated in industrial action in September 2022. In October 2022, the Labour Party put forward a motion to the Dáil calling for engagement. During this debate the Minister for Health acknowledged that most of the funding for these agencies – if not all funding – came from the State, and that the government had a responsibility, and made reference to the WRC (Workplace Relations Commission) as the appropriate forum for engagement.

Following a meeting of the trade unions, it was agreed to follow up with the CEO of the HSE and appropriate officials in the Department of Health. A referral to the WRC via ICTU was issued shortly afterwards.

Despite the best efforts of the group of unions, the Department of Health failed to respond to the correspondence received from the WRC, even though the HSE were committed to attending.

During this time, the colleagues of community and voluntary sector staff employed in the public service continued to receive salary increases under the terms of the Building Momentum agreement, widening the pay gap further. Members in most of these agencies previously received pay increases in line with the public service and this link was broken following the economic crash of 2008.

These agencies are providing vital public services, such as those delivered in the disability sector. Fórsa members are extremely proud of the service they provide. The staff retention challenge and annual staff 'churn' (of around 30%) reflects the continuing difficulties in the sector.

In January 2023, Fórsa's National Executive Committee (NEC), took the decision to ballot for indefinite industrial action in a number of employments, and committed to footing the wage costs of those staff who go on strike. Services would, effectively, be brought to a halt. Unfortunately, at this stage, there is no other course of action available to drive the point home.

This is not an easy decision, and the union knows how much members value the service they provide across the disability sector, in homeless services, and those working across the domestic violence refuges, to name but a few.

Preparation was underway and Fórsa re-served pay claims on multiple employers. As plans to commence a ballot for further industrial action were developed, the union received notification from the WRC that the funders had agreed to attend a conciliation hearing. The initial hearing took place on the 17th April 2023. The parties adjourned to allow management the scope to cost this claim, and are due to reconvene on the 15th May 2023.

The resolve of Fórsa members working across these organisations remains strong and the union will continue to defend their right for pay parity with their colleagues in the public service.

## National Joint Council (NJC)

The national joint council is the high-level national forum for health sector employers, the Department of Health and health sector unions to engage on matters relating to the health sector. These meetings are independently chaired. Throughout 2022 and 2023 many frustrations have arisen between the parties as the union progresses matters on behalf of members.

There are multiple subgroups associated with the NJC, such as pensions, where we raise the many concerns being expressed on behalf of our retired members as they continue to experience undue delays in receiving their pension upon retirement.

Further engagement is expected on a transfer and mobility policy as well as CPD/lifelong learning, also under the NJC agenda.

Another key consultation aspect to this NJC is the joint information and consultation forum where employers engage with the trade unions on issues such as the assessments of capacity for co-decision making agreements and EPA's. This legislation, and its operation, will need engagement with the wider membership over the coming weeks.



## Blended working

The national agreed policy framework on blended working has now been circulated (see page 23). As the HSE is so diverse this is a template document and there may be a need to discuss the practical implementation. The policy is a framework agreement that may be implemented slightly differently in different areas to respond to local needs.

Fórsa continues to monitor the implementation of the policy in all areas. In each area the union is seeking a high level of flexibility whilst ensuring the implementation of this policy does not change other family friendly arrangements members may have in place.

## Pandemic special recognition payment

The Government took the decision on the 19th of January 2022 to provide a pandemic special recognition payment to those eligible frontline health care workers. Whilst Fórsa recognises that many members have received this payment to date, it has to be noted that it has not been without its difficulties. An appeals mechanism was established as part of the process. This body concluded its review and members were notified of the outcome.

The Department of Health continues to maintain that TUSLA, the Irish Blood Transfusion Service and other agencies remain outside the scope of Government decision. The group of unions continues to work towards bringing this matter to a conclusion.

In addition to the difficulties experienced by some agencies excluded from the process, members working in the community and voluntary sector were entered into a process overseen by auditing firm KOSI. This has been lengthy and Fórsa has sought a meeting with the HSE to address the multiple concerns expressed by our members as to how and why KOSI has deemed them to be outside the scope of the scheme.

## Special leave with pay: Long Covid

From the 1st of July 2022, the special leave with pay scheme was cut off. This scheme was set up at the beginning of the pandemic and was introduced across the public service. Fórsa and other health unions immediately sought engagement in relation to the decision to disband the scheme.

Whilst the Minister for Health gave a commitment there would be no 'cliff edge', in reality the union is still waiting on real engagement with the employer. Members worked on the frontline throughout the pandemic and Fórsa has lodged a claim for Long Covid to be categorised an occupational illness. A hearing under the auspice of the WRC is expected to take place in May 2023.

## Domestic abuse policy and paid leave

Delegates at Fórsa's national conference 2022 unanimously backed a motion from the union's national executive calling for statutory paid leave for victims of domestic violence.

Fórsa subsequently lodged a claim on behalf of members for a policy across the HSE and Section 38s to provide training, an awareness campaign and paid leave to all members who find themselves victims and survivors of domestic abuse. This is a workplace issue, and the employer has an obligation to their employee. Fórsa can report that the union has received a draft policy for consideration by the group of unions.

Fórsa welcomed the publication of recent legislation that provides five days paid leave but has said the legislative provision falls below what's required and international best practice. The union will continue to collectively bargain for 10 days paid leave across the HSE and Section 38s.

## Menstrual and menopausal health policies

Fórsa has also lodged a claim for the introduction of these health policies with the HSE. The union has been informed the HSE is currently engaging with the relevant areas within the health service executive to develop a draft. This was the subject of a motion to Fórsa's 2022 national conference and the Health and Welfare division is determined to deliver on this for members across the health sector.

## Job evaluation scheme

The job evaluation scheme, available to clerical admin grades III to VI, has seen a significant increase in waiting times for members, mainly due to the scheme being suspended at the early stage of the pandemic. Fórsa is aware of the frustrations this has caused members and the union will continue to consider all options to ensure it can dramatically reduce the waiting times.

Some of the initiatives successfully secured include a team working three days per week on processing forms, additional teams and an increase in the quality assurance team. Fórsa will ensure this remains a priority until the union is satisfied that waiting lists have reduced.

## Recruitment and reform

Management recently advertised two national Grade IV campaigns, and Fórsa members expressed concern at the use of psychometric testing (aptitude testing) in the shortlisting process. Fórsa has raised these concerns and management has committed that the process is being used to rank members and that each member will proceed to interview. These interviews were underway at the time of writing.

The union's focus moved to ensuring a high percentage of appointments for internal candidates, and Fórsa anticipates proposals on this from management. The proposal put forward by the division is in line with other sectors of the public service.

In December 2022, a supplementary Grade IV campaign issued. Management confirmed that no candidate will have to undertake a psychometric test for this campaign until after they receive an outcome of their interview from the first panel advertised.

Fórsa also raised concerns about the continued use of CPL and other agencies as recruitment partners with the HSE. The union called into question the continued use of third party agencies. Fórsa maintains that recruitment should continue to be the core work of union members. The union met with the HSE's assistant national director with responsibility for recruitment reform and resourcing programme. Currently management is building up capacity in each location to ensure a return to localised recruitment. Meetings have been scheduled throughout 2023.

## Chief HSCP campaign

In December 2022, the Department of Health advertised for its first ever chief HSCP advisor post. This happened just days before the union officially launched its position paper on the need for such a post, and concluded a campaign that has spanned the best part of a decade. While there is disappointment that the post is initially offered on a secondment basis, the move was broadly welcomed by Fórsa and the various HSCP professional bodies. In May 2023, Fiona Steed, of the UL Hospital Group, was appointed into the role. The National Health Office has written to Ms Steed seeking a meeting.

## Community Healthcare Model (CHN)

In 2019 nine learning sites were identified under the CHN Model as part of the 2018 CHO Agreement. Throughout 2022, evaluations of the nine learning sites took place. The employer completed an evaluation utilising an external company (CES). There was also a joint Fórsa/HSE evaluation process focused more centrally on the separation of line management and clinical governance as is envisaged by the model. As part of this joint evaluation, feedback was sought from each of the nine learning sites in the latter half of 2022. At the time of writing agreement was being reached on the final evaluation report, which will set out the areas that now require further negotiation between the parties before there's agreement on any permanent structure changes. The National Health Office plan a wide series of engagement upon publication of this report.

It remains Fórsa's position that any outcomes agreed arising from the joint evaluation will apply across all CHN/ ECCN models of working given the roll out of ECCNs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It also remains the union's position that all clinical staff aligned to the CHN model must agree to the reporting structures as set out by the employer.

The expansion of this model to ICPOP/Chronic Hubs/Interrai has been tabled by the employer but has not been agreed. Fórsa is of the strong view that any such discussion/agreement is premature in circumstances where the CHN evaluation and associated subsequent discussions are not yet complete. Nor has it been agreed in any other area despite attempts by the employer to implement it on an ad hoc basis for a variety of standalone posts.

## Career pathway review

Progress on the implementation of the career pathway review has been very slow and has generated high levels of frustration amongst staff grade HSCPs. Despite ongoing engagement with the employer since the last Divisional Conference, there are several key areas that have not been resolved to our satisfaction.

These include:

- Failure by management to progress all eligible staff in the Staff to Senior Career Pathway in Primary Care
- Ongoing dispute between the parties as to the appropriate senior grade for the staff to senior pathway within the Social Work profession in Primary Care
- The HSE reneging on their commitment from December 2020 to implement the Interim Report across the HSE in areas outside of Primary Care
- No progress on Clinical Specialisms
- No progress on Advanced Practice.

The DEC considered these areas at its April 2023 meeting and unanimously sanctioned a ballot for industrial action. Preparations are currently underway, and the union anticipates that this ballot will take place shortly.

## Children's disability network teams

Throughout 2021/2022, several significant areas of concern have arisen from Children's Disability Network Teams which culminated in the establishment of a joint union management IR forum under the auspices of the WRC. Fórsa submitted a significant list of items for discussion at the forum in September 2022, and included below are some of the key areas of concern.

1. **The return of health and social care support to special schools:** In August 2022, the Government announces the return of health and social care support to special schools without any engagement or consultation with Fórsa. The union sought an immediate engagement with the employer and when it was not forthcoming, issued an instruction of non-cooperation to all members working in CDNTs. Discussions took place and in late November 2022, the instruction was lifted to allow implementation talks to take place as well as a confined competition for senior posts to support the Government instruction. Implementation talks are ongoing.
2. **Recruitment and retention/workforce planning:** There is a recruitment and retention crisis within CDNTs due to the multitude of issues being faced by the staff. Fórsa has sought a workforce plan from the employer as well as a series of key actions to improve the situation. The HSE has asked the ESRI to conduct this work alongside its own internal work on the recent staff census.
3. **Review of reconfiguration:** The employer has agreed to a review of re-configuration and has secured the National Disability Authority to conduct an independent review. Fórsa awaits a draft terms of reference for the review.

To support the engagement, all CDNTs have been asked to nominate a workplace representative and all relevant National Professional Committees have been asked to nominate representatives to a consultative group. This has been of great assistance to the National Health Office team as we engage at the forum on the full agenda of issues.

## Assessment of Need

A High Court ruling in March 2022 affirmed the concerns of members about the use of the preliminary team assessment. Despite significant engagement after the High Court ruling, Fórsa did not receive an updated protocol from the employer, despite multiple requests, until January 2023. This was widely shared with the relevant NPCs and all branches within the division, and any feedback received submitted. As this new protocol rolls out, Fórsa will be engaging with the HSE on concerns arising.

## Statutory regulation

Fórsa continues to meet with CORU – Ireland’s multi-profession health regulator – on a quarterly basis to discuss issues of concern raised by members working in the professions regulated by CORU or designated to be regulated by CORU. These meetings cover a range of issues. For example, upcoming plans for registration as well as ongoing queries in relation to CPD and international recognition.

## Social care workers register

The CORU register for social care workers will open on 30th November 2023. It is Fórsa’s intention to run a series of roadshows in consultation with branches to assist social care workers with understanding the CORU registration process. The union did similar roadshows for other professions when their registers opened. The union is in the process of organising a national event in October 2023 for all social care worker members in the lead up to the opening of the register. A date and venue will be confirmed shortly and the union will issue a formal notice.

## Regulation of psychologist title

Further to Fórsa’s ongoing engagement with CORU, the union requested a specific meeting to go through issues arising from the proposed regulation of the title of psychologist. This followed a decision by the Department of Health to approve a two-strand approach to regulation for the profession, and the airing of a documentary as part of the *RTE Investigates* series. The National Professional Committee will now meet to discuss the briefing.

## Fitness to Practise

To date, Fórsa has supported over 70 Fórsa members through the Fitness to Practise process. Most of these complaints are closed after consideration by the Preliminary Proceedings Committee. Fórsa held a successful seminar on its experience of Fitness to Practise in December 2022.

In addition to regular quarterly meetings, Fórsa also met with CORU’s legal team in early 2023 to discuss the union’s experience of defending members against Fitness to Practise complaints. This was a very positive engagement, and Fórsa hopes that it will bring further positive changes for registrants who are subject to a complaint.

## CORU Fee

As part of the review of Building Momentum, Fórsa negotiated to retain the CORU Fee at €100 from the proposed fee of €295.

## Hospital pharmacy

As part of the Building Momentum review in 2022, Fórsa secured agreement for the implementation of the 2020 WRC agreement on the implementation of the 2011 McLoughlin Report. The Department of Health published the first circular in December 2022, giving effect to changes in the basic grade salary and establishing the new role of pharmacy executive manager. Talks continue to work through the implementation of the remainder of the agreement including the creation of the advanced specialist pharmacist post as well as re-commencing Fórsa’s 2020 claim for the agreement to be applied in community. While the employer has not conceded this claim, Fórsa is discussing the scope of the claim. The HPAI executive is to be commended for its resilience in this long running dispute.

## Hospital pharmacy technicians

Fórsa have sought an engagement with the HSE on the role and responsibilities of Hospital Pharmacy Technicians. We await a response from the employer. We are also working very closely with NAHPT to produce a position paper advocating for the regulation of hospital pharmacy technicians by the PSI. Over 300 hospital pharmacy technicians recently completed a survey to express their support for statutory regulation.



# Profession/grade-specific updates

## Audiology

Fórsa has referred the discussions on a unified audiology structure to the WRC for conciliation following a significant delay by the employer in progressing matters in 2022. A draft report is currently being considered by the parties.

## Clinical Biochemistry

Fórsa is working with the ACBI to address members concerns on the failure to fill vacant principal biochemist posts in a number of acute hospitals. The union is also seeking an update on the national review of laboratory services.

## Clinical measurement physiologists

Fórsa successfully established the Joint Workforce Review group for clinical measurement physiologists in early 2022. The review group has been tasked with delivering recommendations on the future of workforce planning, including service development for clinical measurement physiology (5 strands) and is due to report in June 2023.

Fórsa is also working on a campaign to have clinical measurement physiology designated for regulation by CORU. A recent survey of the profession conducted by Fórsa indicated high levels of support for such a campaign.

## National Counselling Service

Fórsa successfully negotiated the introduction of a long sought-after senior post within the National Counselling Service. The first twenty posts were filled in a 50/50 split between open and confined competition, despite the salary being disputed. The matter was heard before the Labour Court in December 2022 and negotiations are ongoing.

Discussions continue with service management on a range of other issues which will be addressed through the establishment of a National Joint Union Management Forum.

## Peer support workers

Fórsa continues to engage with the HSE on the formal creation of peer support worker and senior peer support worker roles. Talks have been ongoing throughout 2022 and are close to conclusion, pending agreement on terms and conditions of employment.

## Psychology

Much to Fórsa's disappointment at the end of 2022, the HSE indicated it would not expand the career pathway review process to include other professions such as psychology. On foot of this the union wrote to the employer seeking an equivalent process to look at several key issues affecting psychologist members (recruitment and retention, career structure, caseload management, clinical governance, assistant grades). An initial, constructive, meeting took place and the union awaits a formal response from management.

## Safeguarding

Fórsa strongly objected to the creation of a senior nursing role within the National Safeguarding Office in mid-2022. Despite these objections the employer proceeded with the appointment. At subsequent discussions, the employer advised it intends to pursue ringfenced nursing posts on each of the nine safeguarding teams. The union requested the evidence for such an approach and set out a comprehensive response to the employer. The employer has now referred the matter to the WRC for conciliation.

## HSCP Alliance and engagement with professional bodies and associations

Throughout 2022, Fórsa proactively met with various HSCP professional bodies to build collaborative working relationships. The union also attended a number of conferences and gave addresses on the work that Fórsa is undertaking on behalf of HSCPs. This has been very positive, and the union has agreed a formal quarterly engagement with the HSCP Alliance.

## Tusla Transformation Programme

Fórsa had an initial meeting with the newly appointed interim CEO of Tusla (Kate Duggan) in March 2023. The interim CEO confirmed that work on the programme for Tusla structural transformation continues and a draft proposal is awaited. Ms Duggan advised that it's Tusla's intention to design the staffing and skill mix required for each location and service within the new structures using a "ground up/front door" approach to the design process. She also reaffirmed Tusla's commitment to ongoing consultation with the union.

The new structures comprise of six regions with a regional chief officer at the head of each region. All six regional chief officers have now been appointed. The union is advised by Tusla that work continues on designing the structures below the regional level. Fórsa anticipates the model will be based on the creation of networks within each of the six regions. The number of networks will most likely be determined based around a maximum number of child population per network.

Once the network boundaries have been set out, work will commence designing the staff and skill mix required for the services within the networks using the "ground up" method. Fórsa awaits receipt of the network design so that consultation can commence. This will involve a combination of both national and localised negotiation. In preparation for wider consultation with members the union is mapping current representative networks within Tusla, both nationally and regionally, with a view to building upon them. Fórsa will be in touch with local Tusla union officials, branches and representatives in this regard.

## Tusla practice support officer

The introduction of a new administrative role, practice support officer (PSO Grade V) was piloted in Tusla through an agreement with Fórsa. The role is designed to provide support to the social work teams, taking on the administrative burden that usually falls on already very busy social workers. The post will free up additional time for social workers to carry out their statutory functions. Following a successful pilot, Tusla intend to appoint PSOs to every child protection team nationally. Consultation is currently underway between Fórsa and Tusla in relation to implementation. Further updates will issue thereafter.

## Tusla job evaluation

This remains a matter of dispute as Tusla has withdrawn access to the Job Evaluation scheme for the union's clerical admin members. The union has sought resolution through the various third party processes required under the public service agreement because the Department of Public Expenditure (DPER) had denied the sanction request to re-open job evaluation to Fórsa's Tusla members, citing that it was a cost increasing claim. The union consistently argued that it's not a cost increasing claim but, rather, a protected term and condition of employment under the framework agreement which was signed upon transfer of staff from the HSE to Tusla. In order to clarify the issue Fórsa referred the case to the Public Service Agreement Group (PSAG) which has confirmed that the matter may now be referred to the Labour Court for it to determine the case on its own merits. A date for the Labour Court hearing is expected to be scheduled for July 2023.

## Tusla Education Support Service (TESS)

Fórsa took a case to the Labour Court for educational welfare officers and senior educational welfare officers in 2021, with a claim for standardised annual leave arrangements in line with their social work colleagues in Tusla. The Labour Court recommended (in line with the HSE standardisation of annual leave agreement from 2009) that the parties should engage on agreeing productivity measures to offset the increase in annual leave. Fórsa has made significant progress on a productivity agreement. However, before this agreement can be put to ballot of members Tusla requires sanction from the Department of Education to implement it if accepted. The request is with the department since March, and at the time of writing a decision had not been received.

## Tusla on-call rates

Tusla is seeking to introduce a standardised national on-call arrangement in children's residential services. The issue has been on the agenda and the subject of numerous engagements between Fórsa and Tusla over the past couple of years. To date, the rates proposed and the cover arrangements have not proved acceptable to members. Fórsa will continue to seek an agreement which is acceptable. In the meantime, existing localised on-call arrangements remain unchanged.

# Other group claims

There are a number of issues and claims on behalf of groups in Tusla which remain outstanding. These include social care worker grading in the community, family support practitioner grading structure and scale progression, aftercare agreement review, and implementation of the career pathway review for social workers and social care workers. Tusla has given a commitment to the union to address many of these outstanding claims in the context of the restructuring proposals and negotiations. In relation to the career pathway claim, Tusla committed to seeking sanction from the Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to implement career progression. At the time of writing no decision had been received from the department. Fórsa will continue to press for its implementation.

been assaulted in the course of their work. The HSE has confirmed to Fórsa that the scheme, as it applies to social care workers and support staff, is outdated and inequitable. The HSE is supportive of the claim and has submitted a business case to the Department of Health, seeking sanction to change the scheme. At the most recent NJC at the end of March, the Department of Health has acknowledged the inequity in the scheme and has confirmed to unions that it's giving consideration to this issue and the costings involved. The department requested a few more weeks to fully consider the matter. Fórsa awaits an update at the next National Joint Council in May. This same scheme is in operation in Tusla. It is the unions' intention to ensure that any improvements to the scheme will be applied across the board to all Fórsa members irrespective of whether they work in the HSE, Tusla or any other health agency.

## Standardisation of on-call (intellectual disability sector)

A meeting of the staff panel of unions and the HSE took place in March 2023 under the auspices of the WRC. Progress has been made and a draft proposal by the conciliation officer was received for consideration by the unions involved (Fórsa, INMO and SIPTU). At time of writing the unions had sought clarifications with regard to the proposal and these are expected shortly.

## HSE: Serious Physical Assault scheme

Fórsa has been seeking equity of treatment for members (mainly those members in the social care profession) who are treated differently under the scheme and have less beneficial terms and supports than other health workers, including nursing and other health professionals. The current scheme is outdated and fails to treat all health care workers equally when they have

## Home support services

Home support services are scheduled to be regulated by the end of 2023. This will encompass broadening entitlement to home support services, beyond the older persons age group, to any person over 18 years of age who requires home support. In the lead up to regulation Fórsa will be engaging with the HSE in the development of the services, staffing, skill mix and IT infrastructure needed in order to fully implement the regulatory requirements. There are also some outstanding grade anomalies for a small number of existing home support managers, for which the union is currently engaging with the HSE to try and resolve.



# Corporate services

## eHealth and disruptive technology

Fórsa meets with E Health management each month. The union's main priority has been around seeking permanent filling of posts rather than the filling of posts by contract staff or contractors.

Fórsa objected to the temporary filling of the CISO and CTTO posts in the area. Following discussions with management, these posts are now in the process of being filled on a permanent basis by external competition.

Another area Fórsa has prioritised is the Help Desk. Management has made a presentation to the union on possible options for the reduction in contract staff in this area. The SMT are due to consider the issue shortly. If Fórsa doesn't resolve this issue the union will refer the issue to the WRC for conciliation.

Fórsa has been continuing to seek monthly figures on the level of consultants and contractors in E Health. The union is seeking to substantially reduce this recruitment and ensure posts are filled on a permanent basis. Fórsa has sought the assistance of the WRC to resolve a number of issues arising in the monthly meetings, and to ensure there is a functioning consultative process.

## IFMS

A new IFMS system is due to roll out starting in July of this year. This new system will affect members working in both finance and procurement. With any new technology there is always some concern in relation to the day-to-day effect on work and future promotion prospects. Fórsa has received some high-level briefings on IFMS but many questions from members are likely to arise as the scheme is rolled out. The union has set up a procurement working group and met with procurement management and will continue the engagement with them. Fórsa is also seeking further meetings to deal with any issues on the finance side.

## Payroll

Unacceptable delays in the payment of national agreement increases have occurred over the last period. Fórsa has met with management in payroll, HR and other linked areas in the HSE. The union is seeking to ensure that the recent delays are eradicated, and increases paid as quickly as possible.

Fórsa have been discussing the move to four payroll hubs with management. There will be no immediate changes. The union has been discussing the practical effects with management, which has confirmed that no member will be moved from their current work location. Fórsa has agreed a derogation in the payroll area which will see promotion posts being advertised, initially, to payroll staff before the normal recruitment arrangements. Management has given Fórsa its view on the staffing of the hubs. The union is to visit all the existing payroll hubs to discuss the changes with members following the May 2023 divisional conference.

## Environmental health officers (EHOs)

The environmental health area remains a very busy work area. Fórsa welcomed the announcement of additional staffing in the environmental health grades and the admin support grades in both 2023 and 2024.

The main current issues for members in this area include the review of the SEHO review and issues around Dublin Port.

At the EHO AGM Fórsa changed the previous structure that EHOs had to pay a small additional fee to be part of the national professional committee (previously known as a vocational group). Following a motion at the AGM, the fee has been eliminated and all Fórsa members who work in the environmental health grades are now automatically part of the national professional committee.

## Internal audit

Since last September, Fórsa has been meeting with management on a monthly basis dealing with a range of issues including targets, KPIs and promotions. The union had made progress on some issues but as there was a number of outstanding issues, Fórsa sought that National Employee Relations become involved in the discussion.

Following a meeting in December 2022, management issued new targets and organisational structures that were not discussed or agreed with Fórsa. The union has subsequently issued a non-cooperation notice in relation to any changes that have been proposed since the date of the last meeting.

Despite meeting with management, and a series of written correspondence, it hasn't been possible to make progress on these issues, and they have been referred to the WRC. A conciliation hearing is scheduled in May 2023.

## Healthcare audit

Members in Healthcare Audit have had their promotion arrangements changed without consultation. Healthcare Audit was moved under the auspices of Internal Audit in 2021 but all staff were assured that their terms and conditions wouldn't change. However, for the filling of senior posts there was now a requirement to have an accounting or education qualification, as has been the case for Internal Audit staff for some time. Fórsa referred this issue to conciliation in the WRC. However, management amended the proposal. In the future successful candidates will agree to get the qualification on taking up the job. This proposal was acceptable to members.

## Civil registration

Several grading issues remain in the Civil Registration area. Fórsa has met management and is seeking further meetings to discuss grading and other outstanding issues.

## Dental services

Fórsa continues to engage with different grades in the first instance to address some outstanding issues for various grades. The union will require a cross grade position in relation to the National Oral Health policy.

# Incomes

## Public Service Pay – Building Momentum review

In early 2022, Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan called on the Government to open negotiations on a new public service pay agreement, and said the size and timing of any agreed pay adjustments would “need to reflect the realities of the cost-of-living crisis, which is hurting workers regardless of what sector they work in.”

Kevin proposed seeking a review of the Building Momentum public service pay agreement at the AGM of the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC) on 11th March 2022, as Fórsa continued its focus on cost-of-living pressures throughout the union’s AGM season and its biennial delegate conference in May 2022. Inflation had exceeded what had been projected when Building Momentum was negotiated in late 2020.

Average inflation across the whole of 2021 was 2.4%. The value of Building Momentum pay improvements was 0.25% over the same period. The EU predicted that Irish inflation would rise to 4.6% for the whole of 2022. This forecast would mean the annualised value of the Building Momentum increases in the same year would not exceed 1.2%, even when sectoral bargaining was considered.

With the deal due to expire at the end of 2022, Fórsa said talks on a successor agreement would need to prioritise the restoration and improvement of living standards in the context of high inflation.

Kevin Callinan maintained his call for decisive Government action to protect living standards, and to ensure the public service could compete in a tight labour market: “We need to act now to stabilise the current public service agreement, which is essential to certainty in public service delivery, industrial relations, and public finances.”

As pay talks got underway in June, the initial efforts indicated a significant distance between unions, represented by the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC) and Government representatives.

By late June, the process had stalled. The PSC, chaired by Kevin Callinan, said the Government’s initial pay offer - an additional increase of just 2.5% for the (2021-2022) period, when inflation was expected to be at least 9% over that period - could not credibly be put to ballot while low and middle-income workers struggled with soaring prices. Unions told the WRC that an improved offer was necessary to make further talks on public service pay worthwhile.

The then Tánaiste, Leo Varadkar, said the Government wanted to reengage in the WRC-brokered talks, and that it was prepared to make a further offer. However, no further developments took place until mid-August, when unions announced they were preparing industrial action ballots in a coordinated campaign for improved pay terms due to the cost-of-living crisis.

Ahead of the commencement of the planned ballots, the pay talks process resumed at the WRC after a ten-week hiatus, during which the Government said it was reflecting on its position. Unions indicated they would engage positively in the process and were prepared to be flexible. Kevin Callinan restated his position that a significantly improved pay offer from the Government side was essential to any progress.

Progress was swift. By the beginning of September, Fórsa’s elected national executive (NEC) met to consider the details of new WRC pay proposals, engaging in a constructive debate that strongly acknowledged the financial realities facing working people across the economy, as well as their fears for the future. Kevin Callinan said the deal was the best that could be achieved through negotiations.

The NEC subsequently recommend the WRC-proposed public service pay package - to be known as the Review of Building Momentum Public Service Agreement - in a ballot of union members.

The main provisions of the deal are as follows:

- Increases of 3% with effect (backdated) from 2nd February 2022
- An increase of 2% increase from 1st March 2023
- An increase of 1.5% or €750 (whichever is the greater) from 1st October 2023.

These measures are in addition to 1% or €500, whichever is greater, which fell due at the beginning of October 2022 under the existing agreement.

The minimum payment of €750 a year from October 2022 meant the package is of greater value to workers on lower incomes. The payment was worth 8% to a worker earning €25,000 a year and 7% to a person on €37,500 a year.

Fórsa produced a '[frequently asked questions](#)' document, including a facility for members to ask questions, while a series of Fórsa information meetings took place online and in person across the country.

Kevin Callinan commented that neither side achieved all it sought in the negotiations, but that the revised package was a significant improvement on the pay terms of the current agreement, and worth more to those who need it most.

The Government was set to announce the 2023 Budget while the ballot was in progress. Kevin said Government pledges to supplement pay measures with other cost-of-living supports in the Budget would influence the outcome of the vote.

In his capacity as ICTU president Kevin led the trade union delegation at the September meeting of the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) where unions made a strong case for the need for very substantial assistance to help all workers, including public servants, cope with the cost-of-living crisis. At the LEEF meeting in December 2022, Transport Minister Eamon Ryan acknowledged that union representations had had a significant influence on the Government's budgetary approach

Budget 2023 was announced on 27th September 2022, and included a series of short-term measures to help people with the cost of living, including electricity credits, increased social welfare payments and a series of once-off payments.

Fórsa members backed the review of Building Momentum in an electronic ballot by a significant margin (91.3%) on a strong turnout (67%). Kevin Callinan said the result was a strong statement of support for the pay deal, worth 6.5% in addition to existing Building Momentum pay adjustments, with better increases for lower paid workers.

Fórsa's endorsement of the package meant the union supported ratification of the pay measures at a meeting of the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC) on 7th October 2022. The revised pay deal would expire at the end of 2023, which meant that pay talks on a successor would need to take place before the end of the year.

Paid salaries averaged over 52 weeks for the first time, including the cash value of job seekers benefit, which means secretaries no longer need to sign on for unemployment benefits during school holidays. The deal also enshrined 22 days paid leave a year, as well as payment for ten public holidays, replacing ad-hoc arrangements that left many school secretaries with no paid holidays.

## Collective bargaining

The final report of the high-level working group on collective bargaining was published in October 2022. The group was established in 2021 by the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) in advance of a new EU directive that requires each member state to take action to expand the percentage of workers covered by collective bargaining on wage setting.

Collective bargaining coverage in Ireland is currently around 34%, the new directive requires that countries achieve up to 80% coverage. Non-union employers could potentially face penalties for failing to negotiate with trade unions.

Trade unions were represented on the high-level group by then ICTU general secretary Patricia King. Following its publication Patricia said the recommendations in the report will, through increased collective bargaining coverage, provide new opportunities to achieve decent working and living standards for hundreds of thousands of workers, and deliver improved outcomes for workers and employers, as well as for society and the economy.



The Executive Council of the ICTU endorsed the recommendations and believes them to be crucial to aligning Irish industrial relations procedures with other EU countries. The group's recommendations will form the basis for the transposition of the directive to comply with EU law, including:

- That existing legislation relating to Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) be strengthened to enable an Employment Regulation Order to be implemented on foot of employers being afforded all reasonable opportunity to engage
- That technical assessors be appointed by the Labour Court to advise the Court in pay comparison claims with the purpose of improving on current mechanisms
- That legislation requires an employer to engage with a trade union who seeks good faith engagement where they represent at least 10% of workers in a grade group or category within the employment. Where an employer refuses such an engagement and ignores the Labour Court decisions on the matter, the trade union can seek a Circuit Court order for implementation against the employer.

The report's recommendations illustrate the potential for radically improved collective bargaining conditions in Ireland. The crucial challenge for trade unions is to continue to build membership density.

The high-level group comprised representatives from ICTU, IBEC and Professor Bill Roche, UCD. It was chaired by Professor Michael Doherty of Maynooth University. A full copy of the report is available [here](#).

## 'Haddington Road' hours

Civil service circular 14/2022 was published at the end of May 2022, outlining the details of the union-negotiated restoration of pre-Haddington Road working hours, with a floor of 35 hours per week.

The circular, which then rolled out across the public service, implements an independent body's recommendation that public service employees' working time should be restored.

Additional 'Haddington Road' hours were introduced in 2013, but most people who saw their working time increased returned to pre-2013 levels, albeit with a floor of 35 hours per week.

The 'Haddington Road' hours ceased to be in effect from 1st July 2022, when working time was restored to pre-austerity levels.

The breakthrough was achieved following the formation of Fórsa, which brought 80,000 public servants – including thousands of activists and workplace reps – into one strong and united trade union.

The union made the restoration of the hours a top priority in the negotiations that led to the Building Momentum public service agreement in 2020, and insisted there'd be no deal unless the issue was addressed.

Fórsa's strategy won support from other unions, and Building Momentum established an independent body to resolve the issue. Its January 2022 report recommended a return to 2012 working time, with a minimum working week of 35 hours.

General secretary Kevin Callinan said the achievement was won because Fórsa had the determination, capacity, belief and collective strength to make it happen, despite dogged management resistance.

[Haddington Road hours FAQs.](#)

## Social dialogue

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions continues to engage at the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF). ICTU is led in the LEEF engagements by ICTU president and Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan. The LEEF meets approximately four times a year and brings together senior Government, trade union and employer representatives to discuss economic, employment and labour market issues.

As cost-of-living pressures mounted last year, unions made a strong case at the September LEEF meeting for the need for very substantial assistance to help all workers, including public servants, cope with the cost-of-living crisis (see *Building Momentum* review on page 19). Unions highlighted the real risk of energy poverty for workers, including those who rely on social welfare benefits.

Employer representatives at the LEEF also supported very significant government intervention to assist households and businesses, and called for a huge fiscal response utilising buoyant exchequer finances. Unions noted that the Government was moving toward a similar viewpoint, indicating its intention to introduce a further range of 'cost-of-living' measures, which were introduced in Budget 2023 last September.

Fórsa continues to advocate for the State to strengthen its support for social dialogue between Government, unions, employers, communities and civil society organisations, in order to meet the range of challenges facing the country, including the housing crisis, climate response, childcare and education.

## Childcare

Responding to the Budget in September 2022, Fórsa said the future of the Irish workplace is being shaped by how working families with young children are forced to weigh the cost of childcare against entering or returning to the workplace.

The union acknowledged that the 25% cut in childcare costs announced in the Budget 2023 would help many families but said many would still be left with “near impossible” choices about the offset of childcare costs against work.

The existing deficit in childcare, a problem which the State has lagged on for several decades, needs more than a temporary crisis intervention. It demands a permanent and radical solution, such as a fully publicly funded universal system.

Failure to tackle childcare comprehensively means a significant block remains to many parents, usually mothers, hoping to enter the workforce or to return to work after having children.

## Statutory sick pay

The Commencement Order for the Sick Leave Act 2022 was signed in November 2022, creating a new entitlement to paid sick leave from an employer and which came into effect on 1st January 2023. The legislation followed a campaign by the ICTU for legislation to make sick pay mandatory, which won cross-party support and widespread public support.

Previously, no legal right existed to be paid while someone is on sick leave from work, meaning that half of the workforce, over one million workers, were not covered for paid sick leave in their terms and conditions.

Most Fórsa members are already covered by the public service sick pay scheme, while the new scheme will see many Fórsa members working in the private sector afforded greater protection.

From 1st January 2023, workers have a right to:

- Paid sick leave for up to three sick days per year, increasing to five days in 2024, seven days in 2025 and 10 days in 2026
- A rate of payment for statutory sick leave of 70% of normal wages to be paid by employers (up to a maximum €110 per day)
- Take a complaint to the WRC where they are not provided with a company sick pay scheme.

To be entitled to paid sick leave under the new scheme, an employee must be working for an employer for at least 13 weeks and will also need to be certified by a GP as unfit to work.

The legislation sets out the minimum standard that an employer must provide but does not prevent employers having superior sick pay schemes of their own to attract and retain staff, or on foot of an agreement with a trade union.

## Travel and subsistence

Revised rates for work-related travel and subsistence took effect from 1st September 2022. They include changes to the standard domestic subsistence rates, overnight and day subsistence rates. Full details are available on the Fórsa website [here](#) and Revenue website [here](#).

## A social wage

Income protection for workers is exceptionally weak in Ireland compared to the rest of the EU, and Ireland is the only country in the OECD not to require employers to contribute to a worker's pension. It is also one of the last of the EU's 27 member states to make sick pay mandatory.

In response to the Government's publication of a proposed overhaul of the jobseeker's benefit system – which could change the payment structure to make it directly proportional to the recipient's previous earnings – the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) published its position paper, *The Social Wage*, in March 2023.

The social wage plan proposes a move from a flat-rate to a pay-related benefit payment for workers, linking a person's jobseeker's payment to their previous earnings and work history. It's designed to soften the income shock that a person may face if they suddenly lose their job.

Speaking at the policy paper launch, Fórsa general secretary and ICTU president Kevin Callinan said that there is now a "heightened public demand to strengthen our frayed social safety net" in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A full copy of the position paper is available [here](#).

## Domestic violence leave

Fórsa's conference in May 2022 unanimously backed a conference motion for statutory leave for victims of domestic violence. The conference motion committed the union to actively campaign for an effective statutory entitlement.

As the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill (2022), which included provision for domestic violence leave, made its way through the legislative process, Fórsa supported the call by Womens' Aid to include ten days of fully paid leave. This is widely considered to be best practice.

However, the legislation only provides for five days of domestic violence leave. Fórsa wrote directly to the Minister in February 2023, urging him to consider positions on this expressed by several senators at the Seanad Committee Stage debate in January. Fórsa has committed to working with other trade unions to collectively bargain to secure ten days paid leave for workers who need to avail of domestic violence leave.

## Work Life Balance Bill

The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill (2022) was passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas on 29th March 2023. The Government's draft legislation, published in June 2022, attracted huge criticism from Fórsa and other unions, as well as labour law experts and others.

The revised legislation followed extensive work by the cross-union 'Make Remote Work!' campaigning group. Congress welcomed the Government delivering on its commitment to a new workers' right to request remote work.

The Bill introduces a new workers' right to paid leave for victims of domestic violence (see Domestic Violence leave) and new rights for workers requesting remote work, both of which ICTU and affiliated unions campaigned for. The legislation includes improvements to support working parents and carers balance paid work with family care, necessitated to give effect to EU law.

# Communications

Fórsa's head of communications Bernard Harbor retired from the union at the end of 2022. Under the union's programme of Strategic Change, a number of changes are underway to the configuration of the union's communications activity. There are four main areas of activity: campaigns, digital, membership communications and media relations.

Communications officer Niall Shanahan has assumed responsibilities for media relations. Kate O'Sullivan, formerly of Amnesty International and Save the Children, took up the post of director of digital in July 2022. Kevin Donoghue was appointed to the role of director of campaigns in September 2022, and a new post, director of membership communications, was created in 2023.

## Media relations

The union continues to develop its position in national media as an authoritative voice on industrial relations, public services, collective bargaining and a wide range of social issues. Aligning with Fórsa's strategic plan, the union plans to continue the development of boosting local media relations activity, working with branches regionally to create media content and establish local representative voices in the media.

## Membership communications

The new post of director of member communications will provide capacity for the union to lead in the direction and delivery of a diverse spectrum of events, outreach, media, and other practical supports and activities to inform and empower Fórsa's membership. The director of member communications will collaborate closely with the directors of media relations, digital, and campaigns teams to coordinate, reinforce, and amplify their work.

## Digital strategy

Fórsa's Digital Strategy for 2023-2025 focuses on five main areas:

### Recruitment

Driving membership recruitment through increased digital traffic, supporting and improving the Join Online process, and showcasing the value of Fórsa through social media.

### Membership retention

Utilising data and digital tools to help retain existing members. This includes data modelling, showcasing Fórsa achievements, and increasing digital communications on membership benefits.

### Membership information and services

Enhancing accessibility of Fórsa's digital presence and offering valuable resources to members. This includes redeveloping [forsa.ie](https://forsa.ie) based on user analytics and tailoring social media content.

### Digital campaigning

Fostering online activism, increasing digital activism through strategic planning, and using paid digital ads.

### Digital trade unionism

Fórsa aims to embrace best practices from global partners, explore digital opportunities and use analytics to track member experiences and identify growth potential in online trade unionism.



## Campaigns unit

Campaigns unit research officer Juliette Cooper started working with the unit in 2022. The role enables the campaigns unit to contribute more broadly to research within the union. Juliette has made significant contributions to the research capacity of the unit since joining the team.

### TASC report

The campaigns unit arranged meetings with political parties and officials in relation to the content of the TASC report throughout 2022. Work will continue over the summer of 2023 to meet political parties about the role of the state. Supplemental research to the TASC report is currently underway to examine the physical operating capacity of the public service and civil service in Ireland, compared to other European countries similar in population size.

### Just Transition Alliance and climate change

Fórsa is a founding member of ICTU's Just Transition Alliance. Launched in March 2022, the alliance is composed of trade unions and climate change groups seeking a just transition for workers and continues to build political support.

### Housing

Fórsa is a member of the steering groups of Raise the Roof, a trade union coalition campaign, and Home for Good, a campaign to have the right to housing recognised in the Constitution. Lobbying for a referendum on the right to housing to be held within the next Government term. The campaign is hosting regional meetings to prepare for a referendum.

### Four-day week

The four-day week campaign continues to build support in Ireland and across the globe. A report published in November 2022 provided insights into the experience of Irish companies and workers that took on the four-day week trial. Results were incredibly positive. Workers reported reduced stress and higher levels of satisfaction in their lives and careers. Employers rated their experience of the trial at 9.2/10. The Irish campaign will launch another round of trials in 2023.

## Stop the Stigma: Menstruation and Menopause

After members in Fórsa raised concerns about workplace supports for menstruation and menopause in a motion passed at the union's policy-setting national conference in May of 2022, Fórsa launched a survey to gauge member experiences with periods and menstruation in the workplace.

The stark findings from the research regarding the prevalence of diagnosis with a severe condition and the need to take sick leave from work during menstruation and menopause affirmed the union's position that this is a priority to address in the workplace, both as a negotiating agenda and as a public awareness campaign.

Which is why Fórsa has been working to launch the 'Stop the Stigma' campaign.

Built to support trade unions and employees in advocating for menstrual and menopause policies in workplaces, the new campaign aims to empower workers with the resources they need to ask for supports in the workplace, as well as informing workers about these policies generally so they know to ask for them.

Fórsa is also rallying support for the campaign by partnering with trade unions who are already or beginning to undertake advocacy and organising around these policies and raising it through the industrial relations forums with employers.

### Ireland for All

Fórsa joined up with Le Chéile – a cross-sectoral alliance working together to challenge the far right in Ireland – and the NWCI for the #IrelandForAll rally in February. The union's elected officers formally backed Fórsa joining the alliance, and to support its anti-racism rally in Dublin on 18th February 2023.

Participation in the rally is an important statement to oppose attempts by far-right organisations to spread hate, fear and misinformation about refugees and asylum seekers. Far right groups have been targeting working-class communities stoking unwarranted fear and resentment.

The trade union movement has a central role to play in facing down those attempts to frighten and intimidate people who have come to Ireland seeking sanctuary from hunger, poverty, climate catastrophe and war. Fórsa's participation in the rally continues the trade union movement's proud history of opposing racism, bigotry and sectarianism.

## Skills Academy training

Fórsa's director of Membership Training & Development is Fiona Dunne.

Since October 2022, Skills Academy has returned to delivering most courses and programmes in person, providing a welcome change for tutors and students alike.

The first of the 5-module Expanded Workplace Representatives Training (November – April 2023) was rescheduled to accommodate a high ballot return and delivered 30 modules across multiple locations to approximately 80 workplace representatives during the period. Two Annual Branch Returns workshops, in December 2022 and January 2023, were ably delivered by Finance staff who also assisted participants in the practical exercise of completing the returns. Other popular courses included *Preparing for the AGM* for novices, along with one-day courses for newly elected chairpersons, secretaries and treasurers, which was delivered this year in Cork.

Since January 2023, the *Fórsa101* online course, which provides an introductory overview of the union, was opened to all members and will be a permanent feature of our programme running twice on the second Wednesday of every month.

Another new addition is the online *Lunch and Learn* series, again open to all members running on the last Friday of every month and dealing with a different topic each month. This series complements our extensive programme of current courses with previous topics including *Writing a motion*, *Quick guide to public speaking*, *Protecting your data*, and *Menstrual and menopausal welfare at work*, all of which were recorded and are saved to the Skills Academy YouTube channel.

A six-member union learning group, comprising Connect, CWU, Fórsa, FSU, MANDATE and SIPTU, was informally established in November 2022 to develop new training opportunities, share resources, and deliver courses collaboratively across partners.

External bodies provided courses during the year including a mock conciliation by the WRC, a guide to procedures and submissions by the Labour Court, understanding the Public Sector Duty by IHREC, and public speaking for conference delegates and representatives presented by Montague Communications.

A new programme, *Foundational Workplace Representatives Training* is currently being developed with the support of all tutors, for a launch in September. This will form an essential part of our core package of programmes and will be delivered in every location during the next academic year.

Following a series of extensive consultations and discussions with tutors, officials and senior representatives, a permanent calendar of training has been agreed for delivery of core programmes. This will mean that both tutors and branches will be aware of when training programmes are scheduled to take place every year. A printed version of the calendar was published in April 2023 and has been circulated through branches via training officers and at divisional conferences.

Stand-alone tailored branch training days have also been developed throughout the year in collaboration with the branch executive and with the full consultation of the assigned officials.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our students and tutors for their dedication to building capacity and developing new skills to represent our membership to the best of their ability. We would also like to thank all Fórsa staff across the country for their support and help to deliver our programmes successfully and look forward to working with everyone into the future.

For a more detailed explanation of our courses and programmes, please contact the Fórsa Skills Academy [here](#).

# Strategic organising

## Strategic organising

A strategic organising model was introduced in 2020 throughout sections of the Fórsa divisional and membership network. This approach resulted in the implementation of project-based sectoral initiatives, initially and primarily focused on creating influence and building power at workplace level. The initial implementation of this approach was conducted in several targeted areas, subsequently creating opportunities for significant and proactive ground and membership engagement, issue consolidation and the creation of appropriate strategies to advance agreed strategic organising objectives. It's worth noting that such a model was applied during the Covid pandemic and, despite perceived obstacles to achieving positive outcomes through the utilisation of such methodologies, the application of this model has resulted in consistent density and union leadership growth at employment level, and creating opportunities to address issues that are of concern to workers.

The advancement of strategic organising will continue to broaden scope as appropriate, and in line with central organisational objectives. However, it's worth noting that where this model is applied, significant union activation, growth and participation at ground and workplace level becomes evident, resulting in consistent increases in density, leadership and communications activity, and increased union leverage on matters important to Fórsa members. While extremely labour intensive, the investment in this process by the union, through the utilisation of a specialised group of staff, whom have considerable experience in creating effective and sustainable union change within workplaces. However such success requires the support and expertise of the union's activist and representative structure through all levels of the organisation, including, in some circumstances, divisional support. This methodology will continue to be rolled out in a phased and project-based manner, as appropriate.

## Equivalent Grades committees

The continued development and advancement of the existing Equivalent Grades committees (Executive/Grades IV - VII and Clerical Officer/Grade III) is one example of a significant contributor to the growth and influence of Fórsa in workplaces across the divisions during this timeframe. Formed under rule upon the formation of Fórsa, the Equivalent Grades committees are made up of divisional executive nominees, and meet quarterly to identify and discuss issues relevant to all concerned at the appropriate grades. This unique and proactive forum has facilitated the roll-out of several strategic organising and leverage strategies that are championed by the members of the various committees and disseminated through their membership networks. To date such issue-based strategies have included pay, hours, leave and job evaluation which led to the creating organisational influence on specific national issues which has directly contributed to effecting positive change for clerical and executive officers, not just within their workplaces but beyond. Targeted work progresses for these committees as this cross-union forum continues to influence and amplify the voice of clerical and executive officers through the utilisation of a strategic organising model.

The Equivalent Grades committees form one constituent piece of numerous strategic organising projects that are currently operational in a number of sectors.

# Appendices

# Appendix 1:

## Health and Welfare Division Strategy aligned to Fórsa Strategic Plan

### Organising to create a stronger, more powerful union

- a. Assertively promoting the importance of union membership for HSCPs including the CORU related services provided by Fórsa
- b. Develop a bespoke organising strategy in collaboration with the Strategic Organising Unit for the sector in conjunction with officials and branches that will capitalise on Fórsa's involvement in the ICTU Valuing Care campaign
- c. Undertake a mapping exercise of Grades III to VII in the Health Services
- h. HSCP Career Pathway Review (Multiple)
- i. HSCP Career Development and Progression (CPD Focus)
- j. Build working relationships with clinical leads and decision makers in CHOs, hospital groups, and throughout the health sector

### Delivering for members

- a. Secure the appointment of a HSCP policy adviser in the Department of Health
- b. Secure additional assessors for HSE JES and re-establish scheme in TUSLA
- c. Ensure fair and reasonable opportunities for promotion exist and that existing workers are treated as a primary resource (Recruitment and Competition)
- d. Secure the implementation of existing agreements on internal competitions
- e. Ensure that H&W workers are treated fairly and equitably in development of blended working policy
- f. Play a leading role in designing a strategic IR agenda for the civil and public service in order to achieve better outcomes on issues such as shorter paycales, shorter working time and bereavement leave
- g. Create a working synergy with policy and programme makers: Placing HSCPs at the centre of all aspects of clinical design, planning and management and leadership at all levels of the Health Service

### Campaigning and influencing

- a. Work collaboratively with Fórsa's campaigning unit and the network of branch campaigns officers in the Health and Welfare Division to maximise the success of the ICTU campaign
- b. Continue to lobby government to adequately funding Community and Voluntary services
- c. Promote the often unseen, but crucial work, carried out by clerical and administrative staff through its structured engagement with politicians and through targets communications initiatives

### Building an efficient and effective union

- a. Devise a targeted communications strategy to achieve H&W objectives
- b. Ensure representation and influence on Equivalent Grade Committees is proportionate to the scale and size of the Division

### Futureproofing Fórsa for the challenges ahead

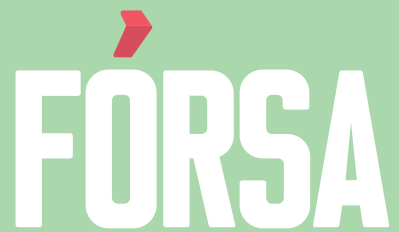
- a. Research and development - across TU movement in UK and EU
- b. Refer to A New Systemic Funding Model: The community and voluntary sector in the 2020s



# Appendix 2:

## Health sector consolidated salary scales

Revision of salaries with effect from 1st March 2023 [here](#).



#### **CORK**

Father Matthew Quay, Cork, T12 EWV0  
Phone: 021-425-5210  
Email: forsacork@forsa.ie

#### **DUBLIN**

Nerney's Court, Dublin, D01 R2C5  
Phone: 01-817-1500  
Email: info@forsa.ie

#### **GALWAY**

Unit 23-24, Sean Mulvoy Business Park,  
Sean Mulvoy Road, Galway, H91 HT27  
Phone: 091-778-031  
Email: forsagalway@forsa.ie

#### **LIMERICK**

Roxborough Road, Limerick, V94 YY31  
Phone: 061-319-177  
Email: forsalimerick@forsa.ie

#### **SLIGO**

Ice House, Fish Quay, Sligo, F91 HHX4  
Phone: 071-914-2400  
Email: forsasligo@forsa.ie

#### **WOODFORD**

Unit 2.2 Ground Floor,  
Woodford Business Park, Santry, D17 E524  
Phone: 01-817-1500  
Email: admin@ialpa.net

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