

Amárach Survey

What members think

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19184 F6rsa SPS advert 03-23

Editor:

Hannah Deasy

hdeasy@forsa.ie**Asst Editor:**

Brendan Kinsella

bkinsella@forsa.ie**Staff writer:**

James Redmond

jredmond@forsa.ie**Fórsa Civil Service Division**Tel **+353 1 817 1500**Tel **+353 1 676 5394**Email <https://www.forsa.ie/contact/>**Message from the Chair**

Playing your part in building up the union

Dear members,

Welcome to the Winter 2024 edition of CSQ. Our division has been busy over the past few months with activity among our branches on many issues, from pushing back against an open competition for the recruitment of HEO tax specialists in Revenue, to progressing reform of the C&A scheme. You can read about both of these issues in this edition of CSQ.

You'll also find updates on events across the union, from our stand at the National Ploughing Championships, to the protests being held by our union colleagues working in the healthcare sector. As a union of over 87,000 members our work is diverse and varied but all of it follows the same principle: when we stand together, we win together.

Now that we are in AGM season, I want to thank outgoing branch executive members for their commitment and dedication to the union. Your work standing up for your colleagues and building our union is essential, and very much appreciated.

If you're thinking of putting yourself forward for election at your branch AGM, please

give it a go. The more active members we have, the stronger our voice is.

Looking ahead to next year, our divisional conference will take place from 28th to 30th May in Galway. Notice will be issued in due course to all branches, but I wanted to let you know now, so that you can plan ahead if you think you would like to attend or bring a motion to conference.

Recent developments around the world will no doubt have an impact here at home. We certainly live in tumultuous times. I know our members in the civil service take great pride in their work to serve the people of this country. That gives me great hope.

For now, let me wish you the very best for what remains of 2024, and thank you for your continued membership of Fórsa.

Helen LinehanChairperson
Civil Service Division**Copy editing/design:**

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In Numbers...

Last July, **Amárach Research** conducted a survey of Fórsa members. The survey aimed to find out what were the top issues of concern for them and how it will influence their vote. There was enthusiastic engagement from members with a staggering 20,568 responses. The survey covered a variety of issues from housing to the four-day work week. Following are some top-line results from what they had to say.

20,568
participated

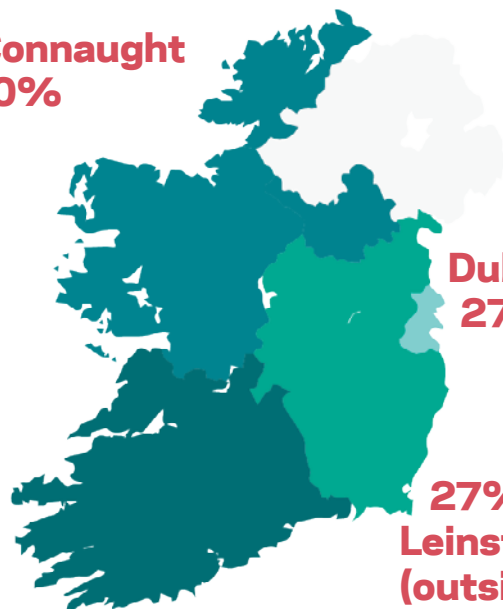


Ulster/Connaught
20%

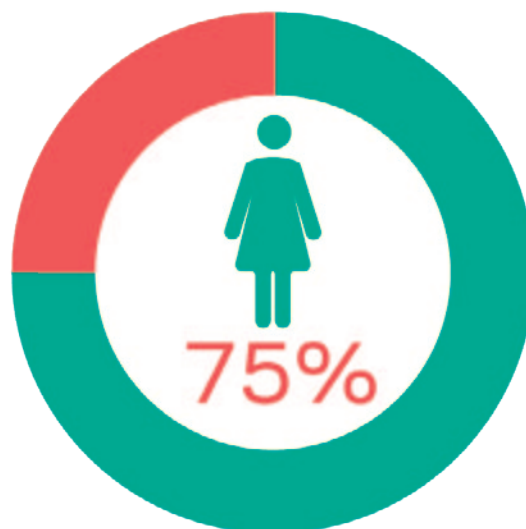
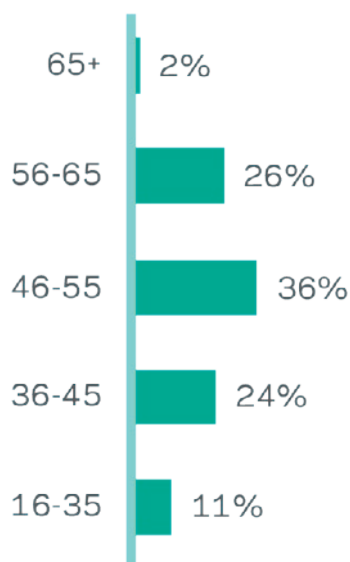
Munster
25%

Dublin
27%

**27%
Leinster
(outside
Dublin)**



AGE BREAKDOWN



Our membership is 75% women,
so this represents a predominantly
female voting intention

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Fórsa Trade Union



Fórsa trade union



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In Numbers...



BETTER PAY

6 in 10 Fórsa members

are willing to vote for those that commit to pay increase negotiations, even if they've not voted for them before. Candidates and parties that support pay improvements are likely to secure considerable support from Fórsa members in the upcoming election.



WORKING HOURS

3 in 4 survey respondents

would support those that endorse a four-day week. The appetite for a shorter working week was the highest amongst those aged under 45. Public servants are more likely to support candidates and political parties that pledge to run a trial of a four-day working week in the public service.



HOUSING

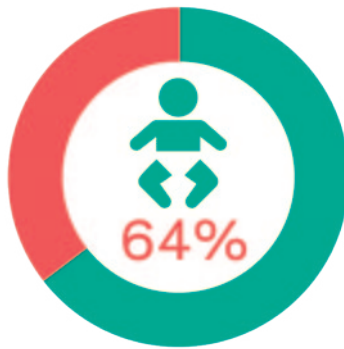
75% believe the housing crisis has worsened since the last election. This rises to 8 in 10 of those aged 35 years and under.

HEALTH

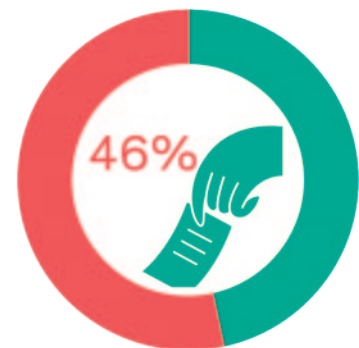
Investment in community health is an issue of utmost importance to our members with 81% saying they will vote for candidates and parties who make this a priority.



Support for a referendum on public ownership of water services has risen to 60%.



Support for affordable childcare has increased to 64% within our membership.



Almost half would refuse to vote for those that did not pledge to negotiate pay increases that go beyond inflation, even if they'd voted for them in the past.

In focus

From archivists to archaeologists, NPTC finds common cause for professionals in the civil service

Bringing together specialists to make connections that matter

Fórsa's National and Professional and Technical Committee is a recently established Equivalent Grades committee that brings together more than 200 grades, ranging from engineers, to solicitors, scientists, meteorologists, paper conservators, medical assessors, forensic scientists, archaeologists and many more. CSQ Editor **Hannah Deasy** sat down with **Andrew Davies**, Chair, and **Hazel Menton**, Secretary, to learn more about what this new Fórsa committee is, and what it hopes to achieve.

Collective issues

Hazel Menton is an archivist working in the National Archives who has been a union member for over 20 years. Speaking to CSQ, Hazel told of how the Archivists branch was able to organise and win a major victory during the recession.

"My branch is the smallest branch in the civil service, but during the recession we were able to stop a measure that the Government was considering, to merge the National Archives into the National Library.

"We commissioned a piece of research that demonstrated that it wasn't actually a cost-saving measure, and we succeeded in getting that stopped."

It was this experience that motivated Hazel to get involved in the NPTC because it became clear to her that it was possible to change things when members work together within and through the union.

Hazel said: "Members of the NPTC are all different ages and have different experiences. We recently completed a mapping exercise and there are over 200 professional and technical grades in and across the civil service. We want to bring them all together to see where there are collective issues rather than individual issues."

For Andrew Davies, an OPW architect, it was the realisation that professional and technical issues weren't being adequately discussed at Divisional Executive Committee (DEC) level that prompted him to bring forward a motion to set up an Equivalent Grades committee for professional and technical members.

He told CSQ: "The idea is that we can ascertain what the issues for members are, and what issues they wish to have raised at national level; and we will seek to represent them at national level, both at conference and on the DEC."

Explaining why this group of members needs its own forum, Andrew said: "Issues such as

professional indemnity, technical certifications, as well as working time and mobility impact professional and technical grades in a different way. That's why we need our own group."

Hazel added: "We must have a specific qualification to do our jobs. But you might also need another qualification or accreditation, such as to be a chartered accountant, or a registered architect. You might have to be a member of a professional body. Members who have to meet these requirements will often face similar challenges.

Creating connection

Professional and technical members are often a minority in their workplace or branch, which is another reason the NPTC is an important way to connect. Stressing this Hazel said: "Some of the members in my branch would be the only archivist in their organisation or Department, so they are working on their own and it's very important that they know they have a support network."

The group aims to share experience and bring members together with a unifying purpose. Summing up the committee's purpose, Hazel said: "While we all have our own specialisms at our core, we have very similar issues. We can learn from each other and learn from the past. The committee gives us an ability to say to members you're never alone on an issue, there's another professional who has been in a similar situation and we can help you."

Next steps

The NPTC has a clear vision of where they wish to go next. Andrew said: "At the moment we're seeking to establish constituencies so that every professional area (which also includes technical members) is represented and has a seat at the table. Then the important thing will be to establish common issues, that affect as many members as possible, and work with members on claims."

The committee is keen to connect with all professional and technical members. In particular, they would like to hear from members in local branches who may be unaware that there is another group within the union that can work on issues affecting them.

● If you're reading this article and want to know more email pandtequivalentgrades@forsa-rep.ie

Picture: Emin Baycan at Unsplash



FORGING LINKS Forensic scientist & archaeologist

Picture: Mount Rainier National Park (CC BY 2.0)





THE NUMBERS GAME US labour theorist Jane McAlevey, who died during the summer after a long illness, authored a series of influential books on organising workers

Rest in Power: Jane McAlevey

James Redmond

Fórsa Communications

Legendary American trade union organiser Jane McAlevey passed away on 7th July after a long battle with cancer. She was the author of four influential books on member-led organising. Her works include *Raising Expectations and Raising Hell* (2012), *No Shortcuts: Organising for Power in the New Gilded Age* (2016), *A Collective Bargain: Unions, Organizing, and the Fight for Democracy* (2020), and *Rules to Win By: Power and Participation in Union Negotiations* (2023), co-authored with Abby Lawlor.

Her writings wove together memoir, manifesto, and manual. The key to Jane's organising recipe was to ensure that there was a "continually expanding base of ordinary people, never previously involved" at the centre of things.

Through her writings and training sessions, Jane hammered home the principled differences between what she called advocacy, mobilising, and organising. Advocacy often ignores "the only concrete advantage ordinary people have over elites: large numbers. In workplace strikes, at the ballot box, or in nonviolent civil disobedience, strategically deployed masses have long been the unique weapon of ordinary people."

Jane emphasised the need for approaches that would "expand the universe of people in our movement" and talked about "waking up in the morning with an explicit plan."



ACTIVIST Jane (right) at anti-Apartheid event in 1985

Within the unions, Jane pushed for the adoption of methods such as whole worker organising, power analysis and structure tests. Whole worker organising means recognising people aren't hermetically sealed in little boxes between 9am to 5pm, but that we live in an ever-shifting society where conversations happen at large – and that power can be wielded just as much in the community as the workplace.

Ultimately for Jane it was about something "that enables ordinary people to understand their potential power and participate meaningfully in making strategy."

In November of 2023, McAlevey promoted her fourth book *Rules To Win By* in Fórsa's Dublin head office. Reflecting on the event, Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan said: "It was an inspirational evening for all present. Although not so well, her message was delivered in the usual clear and direct way.

UNION RULES Jane McAlevey with Ryan McKinney, Head of Strategic Change project, and GS Kevin Callinan during her visit to Fórsa HQ last November

Organise, but organise to win."

In a tribute to Jane posted online, Kevin talked about how he met her for the first time in-person in May 2023 in Cork, when she was visiting to deliver a workshop for Fórsa and said they struck up an instant connection that led to an all-staff training being organised earlier this year. While Jane couldn't provide the training herself, Kevin was keen to ensure she knew the impact of her team's training on Fórsa staff.

He told CSQ: "Although very seriously ill and unable to travel, I messaged her to describe the electricity in the room and to let her know that we were creating a great legacy for her, that could in time change our country and our world. She replied, 'that's such a beautiful and powerful note.' It was always about power. That's how I'll remember her."

She may not have had all the answers, but she knew the right questions. With the legacy she has left, and the thousands of people that have passed through her training activities: her organising is nowhere near done yet.



Explainer

What's going on with HEO recruitment at Revenue?

This Autumn a dispute has arisen in Revenue around an open recruitment competition for tax specialists. CSQ Editor **Hannah Deasy** caught up with Fórsa official **Úna Faulkner** to get a better understanding of the issue and what's at stake.

What's the background to this issue?

The issue arose when Revenue published an open competition at HEO level for tax specialists at the beginning of October.

The union has long been clear in its position that HEO recruitment is an internal promotional path for existing staff. We have reiterated this view on every occasion available to us. Revenue's decision to publish the competition was a unilateral move taken even though we were clear that we did not support it.

Despite direct engagement in the week preceding their decision to publish Revenue went ahead. We unequivocally stated that we did not agree that these roles were specialised posts, and that we are opposed to any form of open recruitment of HEOs. HEOs in Revenue have been doing these jobs for decades.

Why does Fórsa object to open recruitment at HEO level?

The Higher Executive Officer role has long been an internal promotional opportunity. Roles that are described as 'specialist' in nature can already be recruited in open competitions at EO, AO and AP level. Revenue have been recruiting AOs as a cheaper labour option but now claim that this recruitment approach does not work so they were trying to change tack. For us that's an unacceptable position.

People work hard at their jobs and it's only fair that they should get a chance to avail of internal promotional opportunities. We've made it clear that any discussions on a change to this must be conducted nationally with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR), in the context of the Civil Service Sectoral Action Plan. In this instance our view is that there is a wealth of highly motivated and highly qualified staff in Revenue who have been doing this work for years. They also have the advantage of already knowing how the civil service works, which is a key difference with new starters hired through external competitions.

By arguing that internal staff weren't available to fill these posts, Revenue implied they didn't have confidence in their own staff, a position we had to refute.

There was no agreement to this under the

Sectoral Action Plan or in the Public Service Agreement 2024-2026 and we were very clear in our communication with Revenue: we told them they would not be able to rely on our support if they went ahead with an open competition and that it would become a civil service-wide issue.

So, what did the union do?

The Revenue Executive Grades branch were on top of the issue from the get go. Their in-depth review of documents received from management and drafting of detailed observations enabled officials to really understand the issues at hand for members.

They led the direct negotiations and throughout these they were clear that there were enough officers within Revenue who were capable of conducting the function that this competition was trying to fill.

However, despite immediate local engagement, Revenue would not pause the competition. With an issue as serious as this there was a real risk of creating a precedent. If we didn't take a strong position, you wouldn't know what might happen next with other Departments. So, we took it to the Civil Service Divisional Executive Committee's meeting in October.

After hearing from the branch and officials the DEC approved a proposal to ballot the entirety of Fórsa's civil service membership for industrial action on this issue, given the potential far-reaching implications across the whole civil service. I can't stress how unusual it is for this kind of approach to be sanctioned in the civil service division. There hasn't been a divisional ballot in over a decade, which just goes to show how seriously we viewed the situation.

What is the state of play now?

After the vote to approve a ballot, significant engagement between Fórsa, Revenue and the DPENDR took place which led to a collective agreement.

Revenue has clearly and formally stated that the competition is not an attempt to achieve open HEO recruitment. In the

negotiation we pushed for the employer to run an internal tax specialist competition as soon as possible and they agreed. We also secured a commitment to maximise the appointment to promotional posts for people currently sitting on panels.

What's next?

Traditionally Revenue has always had very good industrial relations and we're keen to ensure that becomes the norm again. Local negotiations around the proposed competition are underway. While there are outstanding elements to be resolved we are in a much better place now than we were a few weeks ago.

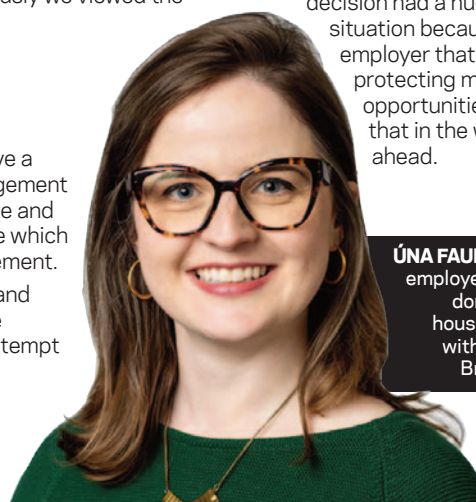
We really need to interrogate what the terms 'specialist' and 'generic' posts and competitions actually mean. We can't let employers in the civil service attempt to pull the wool over our eyes with language like this. Our members are qualified professionals with specialist knowledge and expertise, saying that they can only fulfil 'generic' posts is insulting.

How can the employer say they don't have the skills in house when over the past years staff in Revenue have dealt with enormously challenging situations such as Brexit, the Covid 19 pandemic, and a huge tax take in exemplary fashion?

We're pleased that the employer has come back to the table so that we can make progress on this issue, and other concerns our members have.

Our members showed the strength of their intention and just how loud our voice can be by deciding to conduct a ballot on this issue. That decision had a huge impact on the situation because it showed the employer that we are serious about protecting members' promotional opportunities. We'll keep on doing that in the weeks and months ahead.

ÚNA FAULKNER 'How can the employer say Revenue staff don't have the skills in-house after they've dealt with challenges such as Brexit and Covid 19?'





New EU Commission: a worrying agenda

Following the European elections in June, a new group of European Commissioners have been nominated by EU member states and assigned portfolios by EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. The European Public Service Union has expressed its serious concerns that no Commissioner has been given direct responsibility for employment, and its fear that this implies the new Commission will not prioritise workers.

For the first time since the 1970s, no European Commissioner has the words 'jobs' or 'employment' in their title. This signals that labour market issues and improving workers' rights are not a focus of this European Commission. Or, to put it more precisely, all policies must serve and contribute to competitiveness.

Several portfolios and mission letters, sent by the incoming President to the nominated Commissioners outlining their priorities for the term ahead, refer to competitiveness, using the Letta report on the future of the single market and the Draghi report on competitiveness as the basis to formulate new policies. There will be new initiatives, such as the Single Market Barriers Prevention Act. New legislation will face tests, while existing legislation will undergo reality and fitness checks. The 'one in, one out' method is very much alive, and reducing administrative burdens for small-sized and medium-sized enterprises is a preoccupation – or perhaps more accurately, an ideological obsession for a deregulation agenda.



Socialising the cost

It is worrisome that several Commissioners are tasked to work together to deliver private finance for the Commission's policies. Tax incentives, de-risking and risk-absorbing measures are needed for this. The Commission wants to stimulate a private and occupational pensions market for this purpose.

The brief for the health Commissioner is disappointing. He is not tasked to address labour shortages. That responsibility goes to the Executive Vice-President Roxana Minzatu, responsible for people, skills and preparedness. Commissioner Minzatu will present an action plan on the implementation of the Pillar on Social Rights in 2025 and is requested to propose legislation on the right to disconnect. One positive is that she will be working on the long-term care workforce challenges, including improving working conditions. The Parliament will now do its

work, scrutinising the Commissioners through written questions and hearings.

A changing EU

If all of this is implemented, it will push the EU through yet another significant change. Maybe this is most notable in defence, with many initiatives in the pipeline, and now a Commissioner for Defence and Space.

Industry has lobbied to influence the Commission's agenda. Draghi's report was already evidence of this. A new report from Corporate Europe Observatory lays out how this lobbying was done, tracking the work of several lobby groups and their influence on the Commission's new 'competitiveness' agenda. The European Ombudsman has noticed this lobbying – and ruled twice in September to limit the influence of lobbies.

A public service agenda

There are various angles to argue for a public service agenda that includes valuing the work of EPSU members across the European Union, calling for more staffing, and demanding more resources. A right-leaning Commission, Parliament and Council sets us up for an agenda which has been tried before – deregulation, an excessive focus on competitiveness, and favouring the private sector. This agenda represents a massive transfer of public funds to corporations. Europe's public service unions are ready for the challenge: to invest in cooperation and joint work, to block the negative aspects, and to push forward our agenda.

Update

Progress reported in discussions to revamp civil service C&A scheme

'On the right path' to sort out dispute resolution process

CSQ has been reporting on Fórsa's work to transform industrial relations over the past two years. Now a solution is in sight. A WRC officer will be invited to chair the General Council and timelines will be applied in adjudication and arbitration processes.

Brendan Kinsella

Fórsa Communications

Unlike other categories of worker, civil service workers have no access to the WRC for most issues. Civil service workers are currently excluded from a number of Statutory Instruments as well as the Industrial Relations Acts of 1969 and 1990. This means, aside from equality grievances, grievances cannot be sent to the WRC for adjudication.

For some time now Fórsa officials have been engaged with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) to negotiate a dispute resolution process that will be fair for civil service workers.

A meeting of the sub-group of the General Council was held on 14th October. According to Fórsa officials the meeting yielded significant movement from DPENDR. The Department agreed to set out its position on the definition and scope of a trade dispute as part of a future model for conciliation of collective disputes.

There was positive movement on the issue of response times. The Department indicated

Matters are now at an advanced stage... we're getting closer to establishing a fair dispute resolution process for people working in the Civil Service

that it would be open to setting "strict, time-efficient" deadlines for statements and counter-statements in adjudication and arbitration processes. There was also discussion about both sides submitting their statements simultaneously ahead of an agreed hearing date.

After the most recent meeting Head of Fórsa's Civil Service division, Éamonn Donnelly, said: "Matters are now at an advanced stage. We were very pleased that the agenda put forward was meaningful, and I'm happy

to report that significant progress has been made. We're getting closer to establishing a fair dispute resolution process for people working in the Civil Service.

"The staged grievance procedure we put forward was well received and principles are close to agreement. It is similar to the one which applies to the wider public service and will deliver fairer outcomes for civil service workers. There was also positive movement with the model of conciliation for collective disputes we presented.

"There are more discussions to be had about the type of trade disputes that would require facilitation by Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) staff, but the discussions we have had so far have been favourable."

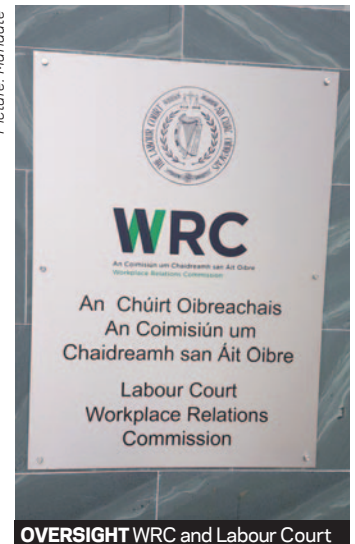
A new era

Possibly the most promising development from the meeting was the agreement that an officer of the WRC will now be formally

PROGRESS
Éamonn Donnelly



Picture: Mandate



OVERSIGHT WRC and Labour Court

invited to independently chair the General Council. This promises to create a more even playing field and mark the beginning of a new era in civil service industrial relations.

Éamonn concluded by saying: "This progress is very welcome. We have spent a long time working towards a revamped C&A scheme that would deliver fair outcomes for members.

"Our aim has always been to bring similar efficiencies and conditions into the scheme as those which exist within the industrial relations machinery and processes provided by the state, through the WRC and the Labour Court, to which all other public servants have access.

"We have another sub-group meeting soon, and we will be exchanging positions in advance of that. But this latest round of engagement is encouraging and leads me to believe we are on the right path."

It's a flawed system, our members deserve better

In place of access to the WRC civil service workers have the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme.

The scheme dates back to 1950 but has seen little modernisation since. For other sectors issues are taken to the Labour Court for recommendation.

For civil service workers individual and group issues go to adjudication if it affects members in

one department or to a full arbitration board if it has broader implications for the civil service. This means that civil service workers take their cases to the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) rather than the WRC.

Fórsa have long argued that this is a flawed system, written in the employer's favour and that our members in the civil service deserve better.

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For full details, check out our website

Explainer

Changes to your State Contributory Pension... what you need to know

Dr Laura Bambrick
Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Plans to raise the State Pension Age to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028 had become a key battleground during the last general election and the most important deciding factor for voters, after health and housing, on foot of the Siptu-led Stop67 campaign. In response, the new (now outgoing) Government agreed to keep the qualifying age at 66.

Unions have never denied the challenge Ireland's rapidly ageing population presents for the future sustainability of the public finances if no policy change is made. But the planned increases to the State Pension Age went too far too fast and would have amounted to the biggest ever cut to the social safety net for working people.

Here's what you need to know about the compromise changes to the State Contributory Pension to close the gap between anticipated pension expenditure and the Social Insurance Fund's resources.

SAFETY NET Dr Brambrick



More you put in, more you get out

The current formula for calculating your payment rate will be gradually phased out over a 10-year period starting from January next year. This change is intended to strengthen the link between what you put in (PRSI contributions) and what you get out (payment rate). Under the new method, you will need 2,080 weekly PRSI contributions, equivalent to 40 years, to qualify for the full payment rate

Unions have never denied the challenge Ireland's rapidly ageing population presents for the future sustainability of the public finances if no policy change is made. But planned increases to State Pension Age went too far too fast and would have amounted to the biggest ever cut to the social safety net for working people

(rising to €277.30 a week in 2025). These can be a mix of paid contributions and credits (**see Box 1**). If you have fewer than 2,080 contributions, you will receive a pro-rata payment of 1/40th the full rate for every 52 contributions. As is currently the case, you must have a minimum 520 paid contributions to qualify for the State Contributory Pension.

Work longer for even more

To incentivise workers to continue working past 66, you can now choose to delay claiming your State Contributory Pension until any age between 67 and 70 in return for a higher weekly payment rate when you claim it (**see Table 1**).

This new deferred pension option also allows people who are short of the minimum 520 paid PRSI contributions needed to qualify for the State Contributory Pension or the 2,080 contributions needed to qualify for the full payment rate to continue working and pay PRSI up to age 70 to improve their contributions record (**see Box 2 on page 13**).

Ending forced retirement

New legislation due to come into force next year will allow private sector workers to

Continued on page 13

Box 1: Paid contributions and credits

You and your employer/ paymaster pay a percentage of your weekly earnings into the Social Insurance Fund, which funds contributory social welfare benefits such as Maternity Benefit and the State Pension. With few exceptions, the payment of PRSI (Pay-Related Social Insurance) contributions is compulsory. One paid contribution is recorded for each week. For example, after a full year you will have built up 52 paid contributions.

You are entitled to credits (credited contributions) if out of work for specified reasons such as unemployment or illness. You can receive up to 520 credits, equivalent to 10 years, for non-caring related gaps in employment over your working life. If you have taken a career break to care for a young child (aged under 12) and/or an incapacitated older child or relative you can claim up to 1,040 credits, equivalent to 20 years.

Maternity Leave Credits

Case scenario: After her maternity leave Maria took a period of unpaid maternity leave. She can claim **maternity leave credits** by having her employer complete a form when she returns to work. Go to <https://bit.ly/3ULFp4S>

Picture: Siptu



PENSIONS DRIVE Stop67 mobile billboard stops off at Charleville, Co Cork

Table 1: What you'll get if you delay claiming State Contributory Pension

Age when you start to claim	66	67	68	69	70
Maximum pay rate*	€289.30	€302.90	€317.90	€334.10	€351.80

*The rates will be set in the Budget each year and based on actuarial factors, which will be reviewed every five years in line with the actuarial review of the Social Insurance Fund.



GLOVES OFF Face of Siptu's hard-hitting Stop67 campaign

Picture: Siptu

From page 12

remain in their job until age 66. Unions have long argued that there is a sizeable and growing number of workers who are forced to retire earlier than they would wish because of a compulsory age of retirement in their employment contract, typically 65.

The majority of public servants already have the right to continue in their job up to age 70 (and some beyond that) if they wish, subject to suitability and good health.

Revenue raising

PRSI contribution rates for workers, employers and the self-employed will be gradually increased by 0.7 percentage points over the next five years (see Table 2). Since 1st October, the employee PRSI rate of 4% increased by 0.1% to 4.1% when the first increase kicked in. For example, if you earn the average weekly wage (€970) you will be paying an extra 97 cents a week or €50.44

over the next year in PRSI. After five years, from 2028 onwards, an extra €6.79 a week/ €353.08 a year in PRSI will be deducted from your wages. The additional income raised from this hike (€1.6 billion a year by 2028) will build up the Social Insurance Fund surplus while Ireland still has a young population, with five people of working age for every pensioner, in preparation for the not-too-distant future when we won't.

Dr Laura Bambrick is Irish Congress of Trade Unions' social policy and legislative officer

Box 2:

How to check your PRSI contributions record

It is now quick and easy to check how many PRSI contributions you have paid or credits you have received towards your Contributory State Pension. Anyone, whether you are preparing for retirement or just starting out in your career, can request their record of contributions, known as a contribution statement, on www.mywelfare.ie or you can email contributionstatement@welfare.ie

Table 2: PRSI increases from 2024 to 2028

Year	1 Oct 2024	1 Oct 2025	1 Oct 2026	1 Oct 2027	1 Oct 2028
Increase	0.1%	0.1%	0.15%	0.15%	0.2%

In focus

Fórsa mucks in at #Ploughing2024

James Redmond

Fórsa Communications

Rugby, football, music – there are countless things that divide people in Irish society, but one of the biggest is whether you've ever been to the annual Ploughing Championships. Slick urbanites and jackeens might drop their jaw in bafflement to learn that one of Europe's largest outdoor events happens every year in Co. Laois.

This year the usual muck and wellies at Ratheniska were swapped for ice creams and sun lotion as the late summer bathed the hills of Laois in sunlight. Held every September this year was Fórsa's first time among the 1,700 exhibitors at the event, which drew nearly a quarter of a million visitors.

What started off as a contest where participants plough parts of a field has become famed for showcasing an incredible array of high-end, cutting-edge agricultural machinery, prize animals and bombastic business marquees hawking their wares.

Speaking about why the union had a stand at the ploughing this year Fórsa President Martin Walsh said: "Our union stands up for workers across this island, no matter where they live and work. It's really important that we're present at the Ploughing Championships to meet members and sign-up new members. Better public services, good work-life balance, equality, and fair wages affect us all."

Grace Williams, Fórsa's head of campaigns, said: "The 2023 National Teagasc Farm Survey revealed that 60% of farm households had off-farm employment, with 42% of farmers themselves working off the farm. So, while some politicians may emphasise the urban-rural divide, in reality PAYE workers and small farmers are one and the same these days. False dichotomies about the

rural/urban divide are out of step with how people's lives are shaped. Trade unions see a shared interest among all working people."

General Secretary Kevin Callinan said: "So many in the agricultural sector are in employment, either full-time or part-time. We need to support those workers. We're here to build our membership and we're also here to support our members who are working at the ploughing."

Khalid El Busaidy from Fórsa's membership team, who had been busy preparing for the event, shared his excitement about engaging with members of the farming community: "Being here is a way of increasing our visibility in the farming community that might have people working in various



SPREADING THE MESSAGE Fórsa Treasurer Michael Smyth, President Martin Walsh, & senior VP Julie Flood at the Ploughing Championships

government departments, especially the Department of Agriculture."

Khalid added: "It's a way of connecting with members and making sure that they can see our visibility and also pass on the message to us. Fórsa trade union

is here, and we represent their community, and, you know, their family members – many of them would be working in sectors that we represent."

Fórsa senior vice president Julie Flood cracked a pun that adorned the walls of the Fórsa stand: "We can't protect you from the muck, but we can protect you from your boss. You're never alone when you're in a union, especially if you're with Fórsa. Fórsa always has your back. We ensure certainty, parity, accuracy, and fairness for our workers in the workplace. So, we have your back. We're always there with you."

Flood also offered encouragement to new and prospective Fórsa members.

She said: "My advice will always be don't ever be afraid to stick your toe in the water. You can put your toe in, or you can stick your whole leg in. For me, I started off with very small tasks, and I loved what I saw. I loved the benefits, I loved the wins, I loved how it actually helped people, and that really empowered me to take a step further where you don't have to go."

Fórsa's treasurer Micheal Smyth spoke about the power of collective union action.

"Union membership is about



STOPPING FOR A CHAT Khalid El Busaidy with Cork Local Government Branch members

For me, I started off with very small tasks, and I loved what I saw. I loved the benefits, I loved the wins, I loved how it actually helped people, and that really empowered me to take a step further...

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Winter 2024 ONLINE **CSQ**



WE'VE BAGS OF BENEFITS Khalid El Busaidy, staffing the union stall at the Ploughing Championships, emphasises the positives of Fórsa membership to passers-by



BAKE OFF School secretary Noreen, a Fórsa member, competed in the national brown bread making final



STAFF SUPPORT Sofia De Lucchi, Katie Fox, and Aisling Cusack at Fórsa's stall

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more than just individual issues," he said. "Although individual issues, of course, are dealt with, it's also about the collective, such as national pay agreements and local bargaining with employers in a particular workplace, where everybody has a stake in the outcome."

Michael emphasised the benefits of a strong union voice,

CSQ ONLINE Winter 2024



"WE HAVE YOUR BACK" Fórsa Senior Vice President Julie Flood

particularly in recent national pay negotiations.

"And we can see from our recent national pay agreements, in particular, the advantage of having a strong voice at those negotiations. And our goal is to make our voice stronger because it's important that workers' voices are properly represented when our representatives in the union movement meet with government."



TAKING ON LEADERSHIP ROLES Equality specialist Dr Lucy Michael, NUJ's Aakansha Surve, with Forsa's Kevin Ward and Khalid El-Busaïdy during panel discussion

Stopping racism in the workplace

Brendan Kinsella

Forsa Communications

Over the past year ICTU's anti-racism project has been working to equip unions to more effectively fight racism and discrimination in the workplace.

On Tuesday 10th September the anti-racism project held a conference for trade union activists and anti-racism campaigners in the Gresham Hotel, Dublin.

The *Stronger Together: Anti-Racist Workplaces & Trade Unions* conference saw contributions from academics, trade unionists, and Minister Joe O'Brien TD. The conference was held to report on the anti-racism project's activity over the past year and launch their anti-racism toolkit.

Contributions made it clear that discrimination is an issue in Ireland. It was also made clear that while there is a willingness to tackle workplace discrimination among trade

unions and their members, there is a gap in knowledge, skills, and systems to do so effectively.

The anti-racism project's work over the past year has been to evaluate the issue of discrimination in Ireland and to begin the process of preparing trade unions to fight it effectively. To this end they have been carrying out anti-racism training across the country, as well as carrying out research, engaging trade union members of ethnic minority and migrant backgrounds in a leadership programme and preparing a toolkit for tackling racism in the workplace.

The toolkit is designed to cover the core aspects of discrimination in the workplace and outlines how to combat discrimination both as an individual and an organisation. The toolkit also draws on the anti-racism project's research to create a greater understanding of the reality facing people of

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MAKING A STAND Fórsa's Khalid El-Busaidy & Kevin Ward (front left) with others who went through Leadership programme

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ethnic minority and migrant backgrounds in Ireland today.

By informing readers of the effects discrimination can have on a person experiencing it, the toolkit helps readers to empathise with what that person is going through and helps them to better understand why they may have difficulty discussing what they have experienced. It also provides information on how discrimination is most often manifested so that readers will be able to recognise discrimination when they see it.

To help readers in combatting discrimination the toolkit contains a breakdown of equality legislation, and the nuts and bolts of lodging a discrimination case. For organisations there is advice on how to create inclusive workplaces, and advice for unions on how to become more inclusive, as well as suggested outreach strategies to engage meaningfully with migrant and ethnic minority communities. Importantly the toolkit provides audit tools for organisations so that they can set meaningful goals and avoid the trap of

Pictures: Congress



PERSPECTIVE Fórsa's Khalid El-Busaidy

engaging in box-ticking exercises.

The project's anti-racism training has proven to be exceedingly popular. Over the past year approximately 1,300 participants have taken part in the initiative. These training sessions were held across the country, including in Fórsa offices in Wexford and Galway. The project continues to receive a large number of requests to host training sessions, which Dr

David Carroll, project coordinator, cites as being "symptomatic of the hunger to address these issues."

The Leadership Programme for Minority Ethnic and Migrant Workers has proven similarly successful. The programme is intended to prepare trade unionists who are migrants, or from a minority ethnic background, to take on leadership roles in their workplace, their branch, and their union. By taking on a leadership role it is hoped that they will be better able to advocate for issues which affect them personally in their own voice, which may be more difficult than it is for someone unaffected by discrimination based in racism or xenophobia.

Workers who have taken part in the leadership programme took to the stage for the second panel discussion. Fórsa was represented by Kevin Ward and Khalid El Busaidy, who were joined by Aakansha Surve of the NUJ.

The panellists emphasised the need for unions to have an

earnest engagement with migrant and ethnic minority communities, as well as the need for representation to encourage trust. Following the panel discussion, Dr. Lucy Michael presented the Countering Racism in the Workplace report, which is the culmination of the anti-racism project's research over the past year.

The research is the first of its kind as it captures and contrasts discrimination and policies from both sides of the border, north and south. It reveals a comparable picture between the two jurisdictions, with similar patterns of immigration since 1997, and similar patterns of exclusion for migrant and minority ethnic workers.

A key issue that comes out of this research is the lack of consistency in addressing diversity and discrimination issues by unions. According to Dr. Michael a lot of work has been done by unions in the past, but not in an organised and cooperative manner. She lamented that there is an abundance of high-quality research "sitting on shelves" in union offices around the country.

Dr. Michael cited diversity in leadership as the key determining factor as to whether or not something is shelved or acted upon. She warned that this is an area where Irish trade unions are currently lacking.

Dr. Michael also warned that union officials need to improve their specialist knowledge of racial discrimination cases. These cases can be difficult to prove as well as having a number of technicalities and nuances which can trip up the unprepared.

She said: "Unions must support racism cases. This is a win-win for unions. Research shows that people helped by unions in these kinds of cases became enthusiastic contributors to unions afterwards."

ICTU General Secretary Owen Reidy called on trade unionists to take the report's criticisms seriously. He said: "The key issue that comes out of the report is [that] as a movement, we have work to do, we need the maturity and capacity to do better."

● The Anti-Racism toolkit & Countering Racism in the Workplace report can be found on ICTU's website: <https://www.ictu.ie/publications/anti-racism-toolkit>

Unions must support racism cases. This is a win-win for unions. Research shows people helped by unions in these kinds of cases became enthusiastic contributors to unions afterwards

News from around your union

Healthcare protests grow as unions ballot on industrial action



UNITED Fírsa members joined by INMO & SIPTU colleagues at Cork University Hospital

James Redmond & Hannah Deasy

Fírsa Communications

As part of an ongoing dispute in the health sector Fírsa members around the country are protesting outside hospitals, joined by members of other health unions, and voting in a ballot on potential industrial action.

Union members across the board are arguing that the failure to fill critical posts is exacerbating pressure on frontline workers, leading to rolling protests across the country.

This dispute centres on the impact of the HSE's Pay and Numbers Strategy. Since October 2023, unions have highlighted the persistent issue of unfilled vacancies. Despite the removal of the recruitment ban, many sanctioned posts from 2023 remain vacant, with unions questioning how funding for these positions was allocated.

In July 2024, the HSE's Pay and Numbers Strategy effectively "decommissioned" thousands of vital positions, a move that has severely impacted frontline services. Despite repeated requests for engagement, the HSE rejected all efforts to address these concerns.

In response, Fírsa surveyed its members in August, receiving nearly 4,000 submissions detailing the growing inability to deliver essential services,



SITUATION CRITICAL General Secretary Kevin Callinan speaking to media at a picket

worsening waiting lists, and the significant toll on both workers and the public.

The results paint a stark picture of the strain workers are under. 88% of those who took part in the survey said there is a vacancy in their department. 73% said this was having a "very negative impact" on staff and 74% said the vacancies were having a "very negative impact" on services. Members told of the "immense stress" they were experiencing, with some calling out the "huge risk to patient safety" and serious impact on morale and well-being.

One heartbreaking response spoke about the serious

repercussions of unfilled posts on patients, saying: "The numbers we are dealing with are so huge. It is a mockery to call it a waiting list because children are becoming adults while they wait."

Another said: "We are short staffed, and my waiting lists are growing due to not having a nurse to assist me. I'm worn out and stressed trying to keep up with extra duties, filling in for vacant staff members."

The rolling protests began at Cork University Hospital and Dr. Steevens Hospital at the beginning of October, and in week two members demonstrated outside Our Lady

Of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda and Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown, as well as Tullamore Regional Hospital and St. Luke's in Kilkenny.

Protests have also taken place outside Cavan General Hospital, Tuam Primary Care Centre, Sligo University Hospital, Mayo University Hospital, and Naas General Hospital.

We spoke to members who have chosen to voice their concerns by attending the protests to get a better understanding of what's going on. Holding placards which tell of the huge impact the ongoing staffing crisis is having, members spoke of the stress and pressures they face when trying to do the jobs of several people.

The quotes featured on the placards are taken directly from responses to the survey carried out in August.

Ciara Dawson, a senior occupational therapist working in mental health services who joined the protest in Dublin, said: "Usually I'm eating my lunch at my desk because I just have to stay on top of work and on top of seeing patients. I can't let them down. There is money coming into the HSE but it's not making it down to the front line, where it really is needed. You see initiatives being put together but they're so out of touch with the fire-fighting we're doing [on the] front line."

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**The quotes
featured on the
placards are taken
directly from
responses to the
survey carried out
in August**

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Ciara was joined by her colleague Leighton Thomas, also a mental health occupational therapist. Leighton told of the day-to-day reality of trying to deliver a quality service with "skeletal staff" and rising waiting lists. He told CSQ: "We have unfilled vacancies that we've had for several years. Now the embargo has been lifted – so they say – but all vacant posts have evaporated, they've gone."

He continued: "We're stuck in a loop of trying to provide services, running ourselves ragged in the process and really not achieving what we're setting out to achieve, which is quality patient care."

"At the end of the day the service users are the ones that are suffering. There's not enough therapists, not enough social workers, not enough psychologists, not enough occupational therapists to actually cover what the government wants us to cover."

Shelly Collins, a speech and language therapist for the past 14 years, was protesting outside Cork University Hospital. She said: "We can't give the best service because our staffing has been reduced by 50% but our referral rate is up 10%. Morale is quite low because we're not able to give our best to patients."

Her colleague Sheila Robinson said: "In our department we've lost almost 50% of staff in the past year. Maternity leave isn't being filled; vacant posts aren't being filled. We can't provide 100% of the service with 50% of the people. I want the posts that have been frozen to be restored and lift the embargo."

"There's a perception in the public that the embargo has been lifted, and that's not the case. We're walking in the door every day with only half of our team here and still trying to cover the same amount of patient care, if not more. I agree with being efficient, but you need the people to provide the services."

Ashley McGowan, a respiratory physiologist at Connolly Hospital where she has worked for more than 18 years, outlined her frustration with the hiring freeze.

She told CSQ: "We had two posts frozen. We're only a small department, and the impact was significant."

She explained that they had proceeded with interviews in the

expectation that the embargo was to be lifted but were later told the positions were lost.

"Two people were on a panel for those posts that were immediately paused, which I feel is extremely unfair. It's terribly unfair on patients that they're lounging on waiting lists. And because of staffing, we're just really not able to cope with this," Ashley added.

Niamh, an administrative worker at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, highlighted how the shortage of admin staff has slowed down the hiring of other essential roles.

She explained: "We understand in admin roles that the priority posts are the posts within the hospital, but if the admin roles aren't filled, for example in HR, we can't then fill the other roles in a speedy time because we're short-staffed too. So it's important all around for a functioning hospital for us all to be fully staffed."

Standing alongside the Drogheda protest, Fórsa's president Martin Walsh warned that the reductions will severely impact patient care. "We're here today at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital to let the HSE know that staff cuts equal service cuts."

He pointed out that the decision made by the HSE to cut more than 2,000 jobs would have far-reaching effects: "We need the government to realise that if you cut jobs, you are cutting services. If you are cutting services, you are impacting lives."

Ashley Connolly, who heads up Fórsa's health division, explained: "While the HSE claims its workforce is at an all-time high, the reality is that increased demand from an ageing population has left the system critically under-resourced."

She claimed that arbitrary decisions to leave key positions unfilled had resulted in chaotic downsizing. "This has severely compromised members' ability to provide safe care. In September, after reviewing the survey results and consulting with representatives, Fórsa's Health & Welfare Divisional Executive Council (DEC) voted to ballot for industrial action, up to and including strike action. The anger on the ground is growing. Staff cuts lead to service cuts, and everyone across the board is

News from around your union

'While the city slept we cleaned up after the riots'

Brendan Kinsella

Fórsa Communications

On 23rd November 2023, a five-year-old girl and a 30-year-old care assistant were stabbed outside Coláiste Mhuire, on Parnell Square, Dublin. Elements of the far right seized upon the incident to incite a riot which would result in massive property damage, looting, the firebombing of a refugee centre, and the torching of three Dublin Buses and a Luas among other vehicles. It led to the arrest of 49 rioters.

From 10pm that night, Dublin City Council's waste management section brought in every last worker to clear the damage. Workers arrived at O'Connell Street to find a street destroyed, covered in glass, detritus, and the burned-out wreckage of cars, buses, and trams.

In August Dublin City Council extended its thanks to waste management staff in an informal ceremony and awarded medals to workers in recognition of having gone above and beyond the call of duty, clearing and cleaning the city centre in the aftermath of the November riots. Mick Kieran, Municipal Division DEC member and DCC waste management worker, said: "It's not the first riot we've cleaned up, there were the 'Love Ulster' riots in 2006, but I haven't seen something like that since the riots after Bobby Sands died in 1981."

Crews worked throughout the night, with workers joining as their shifts began right through to the following morning. Dublin City Council deployed its full arsenal of equipment to the task with rarely seen heavy vehicles such as grab trucks making an appearance. As the following morning dawned, there was little left to suggest there had been violence the previous night, apart from some stubborn burn marks and a few boarded-up shopfronts.

Despite the impressive job done by him and his colleagues, Mick Kieran sees it as another day's work. He said "It's just a medal, it's not about the medal. It was a job. We got stuck in and did the work, just like we always do. It can often be a thankless job. It's nice to be recognised. I think as people we are bad at recognising when we do something good. When we get that recognition it's really something."

Fórsa official Maura Cahalan, responsible for the Municipal Employees' Division, told CSQ: "We're proud of our waste management workers. It's a hard, physical job that often goes unnoticed until there is an issue. The clean-up after the riots just shows how hard they work for the city. I'm glad Dublin City Council acknowledged our members' work and gave them the recognition they deserve."



SO PROUD Municipal Division DEC member Mick Kieran glad workers' post riot clean-up has been recognised by the DCC

suffering – from staff to patients."

National secretary Linda Kelly, urging members from across the union to support members in the health & welfare division, told CSQ: "Our members' ability to deliver safe services has been severely compromised. Everybody needs a hospital appointment some time and the

person who types the letter you get in the post confirming an appointment, or the Occupational Therapist that helps your child or parent, might well be a Fórsa member. They need your support now."

● The ballot for industrial action among Fórsa members of the HSE opened on Monday 14th October and will run until Tuesday 26th November.

News from around your union

'The backbone of our school'

Fórsa's first ever SNA Appreciation Day hailed a huge success

James Redmond

Fórsa Communications

The inaugural SNA Appreciation Day, spearheaded by Fórsa's four SNA branches, has been hailed as a huge success.

What began as a simple idea in a social media chat – where a member questioned why there was a Teacher Appreciation Day but nothing that recognised the role of special needs assistants – has blossomed into a national conversation about how society views and treats these essential workers.

The day clearly struck a chord, with hundreds of photos of activities flooding social media, and the associated hashtag #ThankOurSNAs going viral and trending.

Fórsa General Secretary Kevin Callinan spent the morning at St. Joseph's School in Tallaght, where he met with staff and said: "Firstly, we're so pleased that SNAs are part of our union. You can't imagine just how happy we are. When we were setting up the Education Division, many years ago, I was at a meeting of SNAs, and I'll never forget it.

"One of your colleagues stood up and said, 'Kevin, it's not about money. It's about respect.' And I listened to that and I'm so proud of the fact that together over the last two years, we've made such positive steps forward."

He continued "We're not fully there yet. Today is about building on the first ever Appreciation Day. We had almost 11,000 applications for the prizes. The response is beyond anything we expected – and rightly so. It is only right we thank our SNAs."

Casa Caterina in Cabra nestled away behind a flank of trees on the old Dominican Sisters' campus. Autumn leaves falling and torrents of rain did little to dampen school spirits as news broke that they were one of the winning schools.

North Dublin North Leinster (NDNL) SNA branch members Maria Burke and Christina Scott arrived to present a prize to the busy SNAs on a short break between classes. Christina, vice-



CELEBRATION Ennistymon Community School



BROLLY GOOD The hashtag #ThankOurSNAs went viral on SNA Appreciation Day

chair of the NDNL SNA Branch, expressed the importance of individual SNAs feeling pride in themselves, no matter what else was going down in their schools: "They should appreciate themselves and be very proud of the jobs that they do within their schools."

Casa Caterina is a special school for children with either a diagnosis of severe emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) or a diagnosis of autism. The school has various facilities to support children's growth and development, including sensory areas both inside and outside.

It also hosts a nurture room,

staffed by a dedicated and trained team, offering short-term focused interventions to address non-cognitive issues that may block learning.

Principal Emma Kilcommins beamed as she proudly shared that the school has 17 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). Vice Principal Lorna Cahill, spoke passionately about the incredible role they play in the school: "We have 17 SNAs, and they are the backbone of our school. They are amazing – dedicated, involved, and incredibly supportive of the children, day in and day out. We are so grateful to have such skilled professionals. It's

especially important for special schools like ours, where teaching staff can feel isolated. Having a day dedicated to recognising the amazing work they do, both here and nationwide, is essential."

Principal Kilcommins echoed this sentiment with enthusiasm: "It's about time they're recognised and celebrated for the professionals they are. The national recognition through a professional programme is so important because SNAs are absolutely vital, skilled, and professional individuals."

Noreen O'Mahony, chair of the Education division of Fórsa, had a long day meeting members to celebrate their work and activities. Starting in Limerick and then heading to Loughrea before a pit stop at Bennekerry National School in Carlow, where she arrived wielding congratulatory balloons and boxes of donuts to mark the occasion at a celebration in the staff room.

Bennekerry NS, a co-educational primary school, is located five kilometres east of Carlow town and was also one of the competition winners. It has 425 pupils and a staff of 23 teachers. Julie Fitzmaurice, the principal in Carlow, said: "We're exceptionally lucky because of the work of our SNAs and the expertise that they have, around the school, for the most vulnerable learners and the most vulnerable children.

"I think as a staff, we really appreciate them, and the parents really appreciate them. School wouldn't be the same without them. So I want to really to thank them."

Reflecting on SNA Appreciation Day, Noreen said: "I think SNAs should be very proud of themselves. We're a cohort of professionals and we need to see ourselves as that. It's not a role that you just fall into, it's something people seek out to do.

"We are an integral part of the school community. To continue to build that recognition even from the Department of Education, we're doing contract review talks at the moment."

I think SNAs should be very proud of themselves. We're a cohort of professionals and we need to see ourselves as that. It's not a role that you just fall into, it's something people seek out to do

News from around your union



BLOOMING MARVELLOUS Castleknock Community College said it with flowers



APPRECIATED St Mary's NS



ALL THAT YOU DO St Patrick's Loreto, Bray



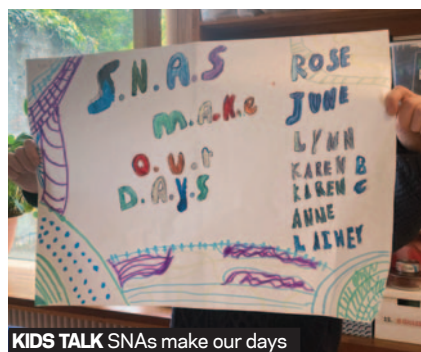
THANKS A BUNCH Floral tributes for SNAs



SUPERHERO SNAs The Model School



JUST DESSERTS! Knockanes NS



KIDS TALK SNAs make our days



TEA AND TALK Nagle Rice Secondary School, Doneraile



CHERISHED Kildalkey NS



SIGN SAYS IT ALL Bennekerry NS

Rights

Period poverty: why it's a local, national and international issue

Catriona Oates

Fórsa official

More than 800 million people get their period each day. But talking about menstruation remains a difficult, awkward and sometimes taboo subject – even in Ireland.

Period poverty refers to inadequate access to menstrual hygiene, including period products (e.g. pads and tampons), washing and waste management facilities and education.

The potential adverse consequences of period poverty for women, girls, intersex, trans and nonbinary persons who menstruate are widely accepted internationally and can include recurrent exclusion from activities of daily living during menstruation and physical and mental health impacts resulting from both exclusion and from the use of unsuitable period products.

As part of the Programme for Government's commitment to tackling period poverty, the Department of Social Protection is in the process of rolling out an initiative to provide free period products for all staff.

This initiative is being piloted in three offices now and will in due course be further rolled out to all offices across the country. No-cost dispensers will be placed in all women's bathrooms and in the gender-neutral disabled bathrooms. At a recent Health & Safety committee meeting, Fórsa reps congratulated the department on this initiative and received a commitment that following the trial, consideration will be given to placing dispensers in all bathrooms.

This initiative has already successfully been rolled out in schools, colleges, ETB centres and many other organisations across the country and we need to support a further roll out. If this initiative hasn't already been implemented in your department or office, have the conversation with management. Funding and procurement procedures have already been agreed so it's only a matter of ordering the products



CAMPAGNING Launch of the joint union Stop the Stigma initiative outside Leinster House in October last year. Unions, including Fórsa, called on employers and the government to implement mandatory menstrual and menopausal policies

and arranging the installation.

Some of us have the luxury of not having to choose between food and period products but we need to stand in solidarity with our colleagues who must make this very real choice each month and push for our employers to get involved with this initiative and provide free period products to

staff. Following on from Fórsa's very successful Stop the Stigma campaign the Government, led by Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman TD, has commissioned new research on the impacts of menstruation and menopause in the workplace.

The research is being

undertaken as part of efforts to inform new policies for employers across the country. This campaign goes hand in hand with the campaign to end period poverty so hopefully we will see more improvements in the years to come.

There is no end to the ways period poverty can be highlighted and policies implemented in your community. The FAI, Athletics Ireland, LGFA and several others provide support to sports clubs.

Many charities, such as Positive Period Ireland, accept donations and will provide products to the most vulnerable in your community and a certain supermarket will send you a voucher each month for a free box of sanitary pads or tampons when you sign up to their App.

Our union has led the campaign to get menstruation and menopause recognised as workplace issues, let's keep the momentum going and work towards eradicating period poverty.

The health impacts of period poverty may include:

- Inability to change period products such as tampons at regular intervals may result in increased risk of infection and toxic shock syndrome (TSS);
- Use of inappropriate improvised period products, such as strips of cloth, socks etc., may cause chafing and increase risk of infection;
- Infrequent changing of period products can increase the risk of leakage, risking embarrassment and possibly further consequences such as social isolation and absenteeism from school, college, work, necessary appointments and other scheduled events;
- There is a consequent psychosocial and mental health impact of self-exclusion from school/work/social activities/sport and exercise during menstruation, and consequent feelings of marginalisation, resulting from period poverty.





Here for you.

Fórsa members can avail of counselling, legal advice and support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, at no additional cost to the member, through the following helplines:

- At no additional cost to the member, legal help in bodily injury cases **0818 776644**
- At no additional cost to the member, 24/7 legal advice helpline **0818 776644**
- At no additional cost to the member, 24/7 confidential counselling helpline **1800 776655**
- At no additional cost to the member, 24/7 domestic assistance helpline **091 545928**

Health and medical information service – **0818 254164**

Another service exclusive to Fórsa members is an information service on health and fitness, and non-diagnostic advice on medical matters.

Advice on allergies, the side effects of drugs and how to improve general fitness are also available as part of this service.

Health and medical information is provided by qualified nurses 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday, excluding public and bank holidays.

If you call outside these times, a message will be taken and a return call arranged within the operating hours.

Call **0818 254164**



LGBTQI+

Pride in Pictures

...what Pride means to you

The Department of Social Protection Executive Grades Branch recently ran a competition to celebrate Pride month. Members were invited to submit their favourite photograph of a Pride event and a few words on what Pride means to them. After considering all entries the committee announce David Murphy as the winner and recipient of the €250 prize money.

David's submission was a photo from the Waterford Intreo office's campaign for inclusion and diversity in June 2021.

Fórsa official Catriona Oates told CSQ: "We were overwhelmed with the entries and the level of participation and support of Pride from our members, and we thank each and every member for entering the competition."

Here are a selection of the entries received...

David Murphy

"I was the Local Office Manager at the time and following the removal and burning of the Pride flag in Waterford we were determined to stand together and support the LGBTQ+ community in Waterford of which I am a proud member.

"Though social distancing was in place and mask wearing was recommended in the workplace due to Covid restrictions, we safely gathered to show our support and solidarity with customers and staff who may feel isolated, marginalised and excluded from society."

Brendan Halpin

"I am involved in a sport called full contact medieval combat which on the surface appears to be a very male, straight, and heteronormative space. I have worked very hard to make my club an inclusive, welcoming, and safe



space for everyone. Participating in Pride with the club brings me so much joy."

Robin Nolan

"Here's a photo of me under my umbrella at Pride. This year I had the privilege of speaking at Pride

from the main stage with TENI. I feel like the umbrella photo was appropriate - everyone there had them. To my cúpla focal about Pride - I know that there's a lot of trans people in Ireland that don't get to live openly I as I do. The

Continued on page 25



Robin Nolan

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fact I got to transition was genuinely a privilege, given the state of trans healthcare and rights in Ireland. To me, Pride is the process by which that changes, and we get a future where everyone can live like I get to. Pride is progress, and we're not done yet."

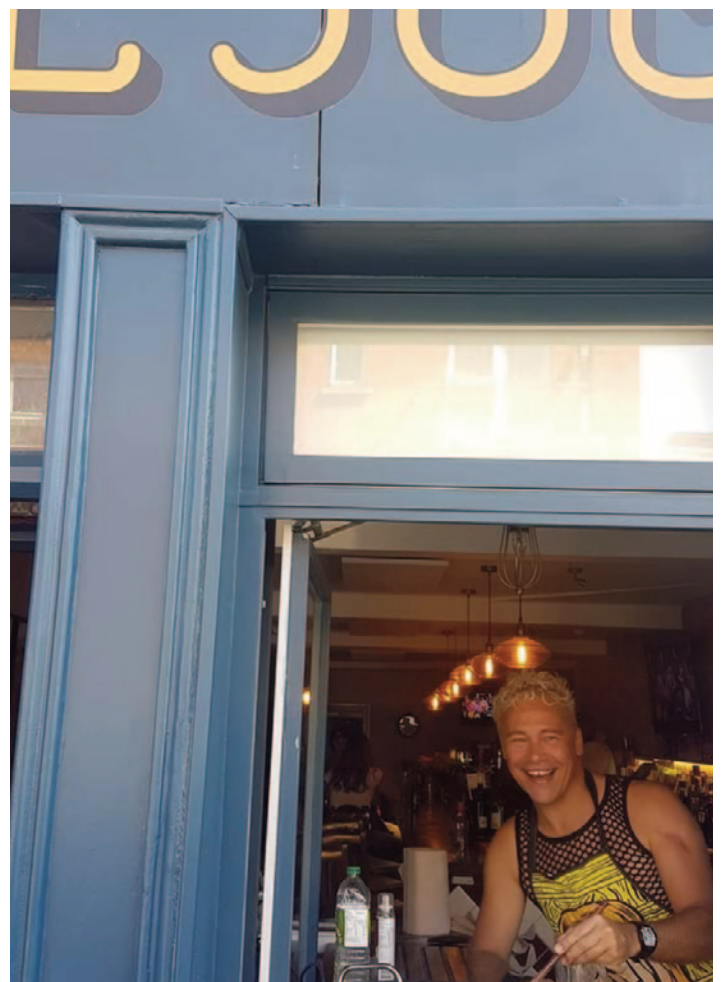
Maggie Jardine

"This pic is of two of my three kids, Eoin and Olivia, walking with Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) in London Pride 2023. Eoin is a proud gay man who works as a senior paramedic in Brixton Prison and having HIV, is an advocate for THT in their 'Positive Voices' outreach programme. Liv is the baby and identifies as bi. Incidentally, my eldest Andrew is in the Civil Service and is also gay! I've contributed a lot to the LGBTQ+ community in Ireland!!"

Phillip Yeates

"The first photo was taken on the Sunday morning after the Saturday Pride parade in 2016, I was on the Dublin Pride organising team that year and had been on stage in Merrion Square and this sight greeted me on my way home.

"The second is Pride 2018 when a group of us took over The Jug on Francis Street and cooked a free breakfast for the whole community. Pride is respect, it is friends and family, and it is visibility!"

Maggie Jardine**Phillip Yeates**

Make the time to check, be breast aware

October was Breast Cancer awareness month. Every family in Ireland knows what it feels like to get a phone call sharing a cancer diagnosis. Each year in Ireland more than 3,400 women and approximately 30 men are diagnosed with breast cancer. Treatments range from surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, hormone therapy and targeted therapies. Fundraising for further research into new treatment remains vital.

Cathy Hannigan was diagnosed with breast cancer at age of 23. This summer she raised more than €8,000 for Breast Cancer Ireland, supported by many Fórsa members. Cathy's father Billy and brother Liam will be well known to members as part of the Fórsa staff team.

Speaking about why fundraising remains vital Cathy said: "These funds go towards research to find new treatments for breast cancer. Throughout my treatments, I have been told by my doctors how much breast cancer treatments have advanced in recent years. With further research, even more new treatments can be trialled so that everyone diagnosed has a fighting chance."

Cathy also urged people to remember the importance of self-checks, pointing out that "getting an early diagnosis can completely change treatment outcome".

Early diagnosis is crucial so this month we're sharing a Breast Health Q&A for members on page 25, with Breast Cancer Ireland Chair Prof. Arnie Hill.

KEEP CHECKING Every 29 seconds, someone in the world is diagnosed with breast cancer. Cathy Hannigan received her diagnosis when she was aged only 23. Cathy, whose father Billy and brother Liam work for Fórsa, took part in the Very Pink Run at the end of August raising more than €8,000 for Breast Cancer Ireland



Health focus

1. How often should I do a self-check?

You should check your breasts once a month to know what is normal for you. This will help you recognise an abnormality if one occurs. For women who are pre-menopausal, generally a week to 10 days after your period is the best time. If you are post-menopausal, just pick the same day each month. It is important for all women to check their breasts monthly from teenage years throughout adulthood, whatever your family history, age, or risk status, make sure you make time for a monthly check.

2. What should I look out for?

Knowing what is normal for you is the first step to recognising an abnormality. Stand in front of the mirror and look at the skin of your breasts with your hands on your hips, and then raising your hands above your head. This will help you recognise any skin changes or puckering that a lump in the breast may cause. Look for any changes to your nipples, any discharge or new inversion of a nipple. This visual inspection of your breasts is just as important as palpation your breasts and any changes should be checked by your GP. When examining your breasts, feel for any new lumps, thickened areas or swelling that is unusual for you and follow the breast self-examination video and Breast Cancer Ireland's breast aware to help you with your technique of self-examination. Download the Breast Cancer Ireland App to schedule discrete monthly reminders along with a useful step-by-step simulated video.

3. If I notice something unusual, what should I do next?

Firstly, do not panic. There are a large number of benign lumps that can occur in the breast. Nine out of 10 women I see in my practice do not have a cancer diagnosis and although breast cancer is one of the more common cancers in women, if you notice a change, this does not mean you have breast cancer. The first step is to visit your GP who will examine your breasts and decide what steps to take in next.

4. If the GP deems further investigation is required, what happens next?

If your GP feels it is necessary they will refer you to one of the eight breast cancer centres in Ireland for further evaluation. It is important to attend one of the eight centres as there are breast surgeons, radiologists, pathologists and nursing staff who specialise in breast care and can provide the best evidence-based care.

5. What can I expect if I'm referred for further tests?

If you are referred for further tests by your GP, you will most likely attend a triple assessment clinic in one of the eight breast centres. In this clinic, you will be seen first by a doctor who will take a focused medical history from you and

Breast Health Q&A

with **Prof. Arnold Hill**,
Consultant Breast
Surgeon & Chair,
Breast Cancer Ireland



do a clinical examination. If you have a family history of breast cancer it is useful to have this information to hand, usually the type of relative and the age they were diagnosed. Where appropriate your doctor will then send you for some breast imaging, which would be a mammogram and ultrasound of the abnormal area. The radiologist may take a biopsy of this on the same day.

6. Will tests differ depending on my age?

In general, mammograms are performed on women over the age of 35. Due to the nature of younger breast tissue, abnormalities are not as easily visualised on a mammogram in younger women so an ultrasound may be performed. If you do have an abnormality your doctor may decide to do both as they complement each other when diagnosing breast disease, both benign and cancerous.

7. What kind of a "wait time" could I expect for tests?

For some patients these tests are done on the same day where possible and when deemed clinically appropriate by your breast surgeon. If you don't have your tests done on the same day, your doctor will be able to reassure you and you will be called for your mammogram in the coming weeks.

8. I'm very anxious at medical appointments and sometimes forget to ask questions. Am I allowed to have a friend or family member attend appointments for support?

Absolutely! It is always very useful to have somebody with you to ask questions, take in the information from your doctor or nurse and to be a support at this stressful time.

9. Do you have any tips for coping while waiting for medical results or going through cancer treatment?

Waiting for results and not knowing what lies ahead in the future can be very difficult. It is important to try and continue to do the things that you like, whether it be exercise, meeting with friends or even working! Be good to yourself and use the support of family and friends around you. Your breast care nurse can also give you some information on local support groups that can help you during this difficult time.

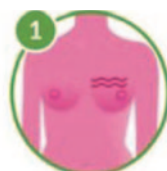
**BREAST
CANCER
IRELAND**
researching a cure

Remember to download the **Breast Cancer Ireland App** for monthly reminders and a step-by-step simulated video on self-examination.

Go to:

<https://www.breastcancerireland.com/education-awareness/free-to-download-app/>

8 warning signs to look for...



A puckering of the skin of the breast



A lump in the breast or armpit



A change in the skin around the nipple or nipple discharge



Dimpling of the nipple or nipple retraction



An unusual increase in the size of one breast



One breast unusually lower than the other. Nipples at different levels



An enlargement of the glands



An unusual swelling in the armpit

Training

Pathway to empowerment

James Redmond talks to Fórsa Skills Academy head **Fiona Dunne** about the key role trade union education plays in transforming people's lives and in reflecting the grassroots values of organised labour

For Fiona Dunne, who heads up the Fórsa Skills Academy, education is about building a pathway to empowerment for members of the union.

With a career deeply rooted in the trade union movement and experience at the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), Fiona joined Fórsa's Skills Academy in September 2022. One of her initial challenges was addressing some reluctance among seasoned union members to identify their need for further training.

She explained: "It was interesting when I started here two years ago; there were a lot of people who told me that they were fully trained and didn't require any further training.

"It was a bit of a challenge. But creating a developmental and supportive pathway ensures we meet the needs of all our workplace representatives where they are at."

To overcome this, Fiona introduced confidence-building as a central component at every training level, starting with the Level One course.

"A lot of the time, when I open the Level One training, I say to activists and reps, you know a lot of this stuff, it's a lot of common sense. It's just putting it in a package."

Fiona envisions a structured pathway that guides members from initial involvement to senior roles within the union. Beginning with a Fórsa induction, this pathway continues through Level One and Level Two Workplace Representatives' Training that cover skills in communication, organising, engaging and empowering members.

"I'm developing a strong pathway for activists and reps to support them on their development journey," Fiona said.

Looking ahead, she's also developing a Level Three course for next year, which will explore employment law and industrial relations, among other potential topics. The Skills Academy



'PUTTING COMMON SENSE IN A PACKAGE' Fórsa Skills Academy head Fiona Dunne on her structured approach to training

further supports branch officers with specialised training in time management, communication skills, public speaking, and negotiation skills essential to leadership roles.

The training structure emphasises workplace representatives at the Academy's core, with additional courses available for branch officers and those advancing into more senior activist positions.

The approach underscores grassroots engagement and union democracy, both critical to effective union representation. "There is a lot more conversation about the benefit of the union," she noted, observing a shift away from reliance on headquarters and a return to locally based trade

unionism. Workplace democracy means that taking action and finding solutions should be as close to work as possible," she added, explaining that solving issues locally strengthens both responsiveness and union cohesion.

In Level One training, reps learn fundamental union principles, from working with integrity and in solidarity to grievance processes and disciplinary procedures, reinforcing practical knowledge and the union's collective values.

Fiona recalls that her experience during the pandemic is what inspired the union's popular live 'Lunch and Learn' sessions, which take place on the last Friday of each month and

tackle topics from digital activism to mental health.

These online sessions keep union members connected and for many can be their first engagement with union activities outside formal meetings. One of the most popular sessions, on CV writing by Fórsa's HR manager Rebecca Woolf, was huge. "We had 480 registrations for that, which we've never surpassed," she said.

Although Fiona is the most visible face of the Skills Academy, she is quick to credit her teammates. "I'm ably supported by Judith in Cork, who is the administrator. She's 'front of house' is the way I describe it."

Judith's engagement with applicants and logistics allows Fiona to focus on programme development and strategy. Roisin Nolan, another essential team member, works "as our technical

Workplace democracy means that taking action and finding solutions should be as close to work as possible

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Training

Pathway to empowerment

From page 28

back-up," handling technical tasks such as data management and record-keeping. "She keeps records of attendance, and she does all the techie work for online courses," Fiona added.

When asked if the Skills Academy continues the long tradition of self-education in the workers' movement, Fiona highlighted that union-based education has historically offered working people valuable opportunities. Unlike more formal education models, union training

doesn't place too much emphasis on accreditation but rests on a philosophical foundation rooted in collective learning and practical application.

"The principles include things like, you know, it's group oriented. So, it's about working together. It's about the collective and sharing knowledge," she explained, underscoring how the lived experiences of workers and reps are valuable assets in union roles. Through conversations with Fiona and positive feedback from participants, it's clear that the Skills Academy's work is more than just training up a roster of robotic union representatives. Instead, the Academy's education

fosters personal and professional growth, as well as community and political engagement. And that helps also to encourage them to be more politically engaged, and that's politics with small 'p' in terms of their community, in terms of the workplace, but also in terms of the broader political agenda that we would be interested in them getting involved in," enthuses Fiona.

Looking ahead, Fiona sees further potential for collaboration with institutions such as the National College of Ireland and the University of Limerick, enriching paths to lifelong learning for union members. "I suppose if you talk to anyone that

knows me over the years, I've always had a busy job," she said, constantly working to spread the word about upcoming courses.

One of the next initiatives will explore the BDS and the Occupied Territories Bill. "Our next Lunch and Learn is going to talk about the BDS and the Occupied Territories Bill. We're going to try and get people to understand why we're involved in that and what they can do in terms of supporting that."

It's evident that Fiona's work goes beyond traditional training – it's about creating a more empowered, engaged, and resilient trade union community.



Investing in Knowledge Investing in Skills Investing in You

For further information on any of our training programmes, please contact

Judith Coffey

Administrator, Fórsa Training Skills Academy

t: 021 4255221 or 087 4072603 e: skillsacademy@forসা.ie



Tailored skills training for every Fórsa representative

Budget 2025



ADDING FUEL TO THE FIRE Minister for Finance Jack Chambers delivers an expansionary budget 2025 to the Dáil

Picture: Dáil Éireann

Fiscally irresponsible

With the general election fast approaching, NERI co-director **Dr Tom McDonnell** examines the short-termism behind the drafting of budget 2025 and its probable inflationary impact on the wider economy

Budget 2025 was announced on 1st October and contained a range of spending increases and tax cuts totalling about €10.5 billion of which €2.2 billion was once-off in nature.

The scale of the budget was fiscally irresponsible in the current economic context. An expansionary budget makes little economic sense when the economy is operating at close to full employment with significant capacity constraints due to labour shortages and infrastructure deficits. The budget will add to inflationary pressures although this will be relatively modest in scale.

Clearly the budget owes more to short-term electoral concerns than it does to sensible fiscal management. We are using

potentially transitory corporation tax receipts to fuel a pre-election giveaway. Without these receipts the budget would be in deficit.

Budgets should be counter-cyclical. In other words, if the economy is doing badly governments should act to boost the economy and if the economy is booming they should try and slow things down. Unfortunately budget 2025 is pro-cyclical and

pouring extra money into an already hot economy. It harkens to the reckless pre-crash budgetary strategies although the chances of a similar collapse are fortunately very slim.

Regressive tax cuts

The tax cuts in the budget are largely regressive. A worker on €30,000 will see a €5 increase in take-home pay whereas a worker on €75,000 will gain

€20. In addition, the wealthiest families will benefit by over €21,000 from the increase in the Capital Acquisition Tax (i.e. inheritance tax) threshold to €400,000. In comparison, a worker on €40,000 would pay around €64,000 in taxes after 10 years working, while a minimum wage worker would have to work for most of a year to earn the value of the inheritance tax cut.

The budget also contained the usual collection of regressive tax breaks such as mortgage interest relief and the help to buy relief. Overall, the big winners from the tax changes will be the wealthiest families and those on higher incomes that stand to benefit

Clearly the budget owes more to short-term electoral concerns than it does to sensible fiscal management. We are using potentially transitory corporation tax receipts to fuel a pre-election giveaway. Without these receipts the budget would be in deficit

Continued on page 31

Picture: Bill Jacobus (CC BY 2.0)

**BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE** Welcome announcements on infrastructure will go towards addressing significant deficits in housing, energy, water, and transport

Fiscally irresponsible

From page 30

from all of the changes to personal taxes. The relative losers are those without wealth and workers on lower incomes.

Tax cuts now will eventually push higher taxes on to future and younger workers. We will soon need to grapple with the fiscally costly megatrends of an ageing population and green transition as well as a swathe of other challenges.

Over-reliance on once-offs will not protect the most vulnerable

The ongoing reliance on 'temporary' universal cost-of-living measures flies in the face of evidence that such measures will not protect vulnerable households from material deprivation and poverty in a context of permanent structural price increases. Such measures at best postpone the loss of real income from rising prices.

Most welfare supports have failed to keep pace with the price increases of recent years so that once the once-off measures are

Picture: Horst Gutman (CC BY-SA 2.0)

**BURST PIPE** Water is one of many areas of the economy is need of investment

withdrawn we will see a surge in the rates of poverty and deprivation. It is also perhaps no coincidence that much of the value of the once-off supports will go to households later in 2024, around the time of the General Election. The government could have chosen a different path. For example, it could have introduced a second tier of child benefit that would have lifted tens of

thousands of children out of poverty.

Welcome move

The budget announcements regarding infrastructure were a rare bright spot and very welcome. Notably, the AIB and Apple money will be allocated to roll out infrastructure in the years ahead. This is crucial as Ireland has very significant deficits in

housing, energy, water, and transport. These are all constraints on the economy.

However, it is not clear whether the government has a strategy to encourage the supply of construction workers. There will need to be much greater emphasis on funding for apprenticeships as well as better terms and conditions in the sector if we are to solve the housing crisis and simultaneously make the investments needed for the green transition.

Universal services

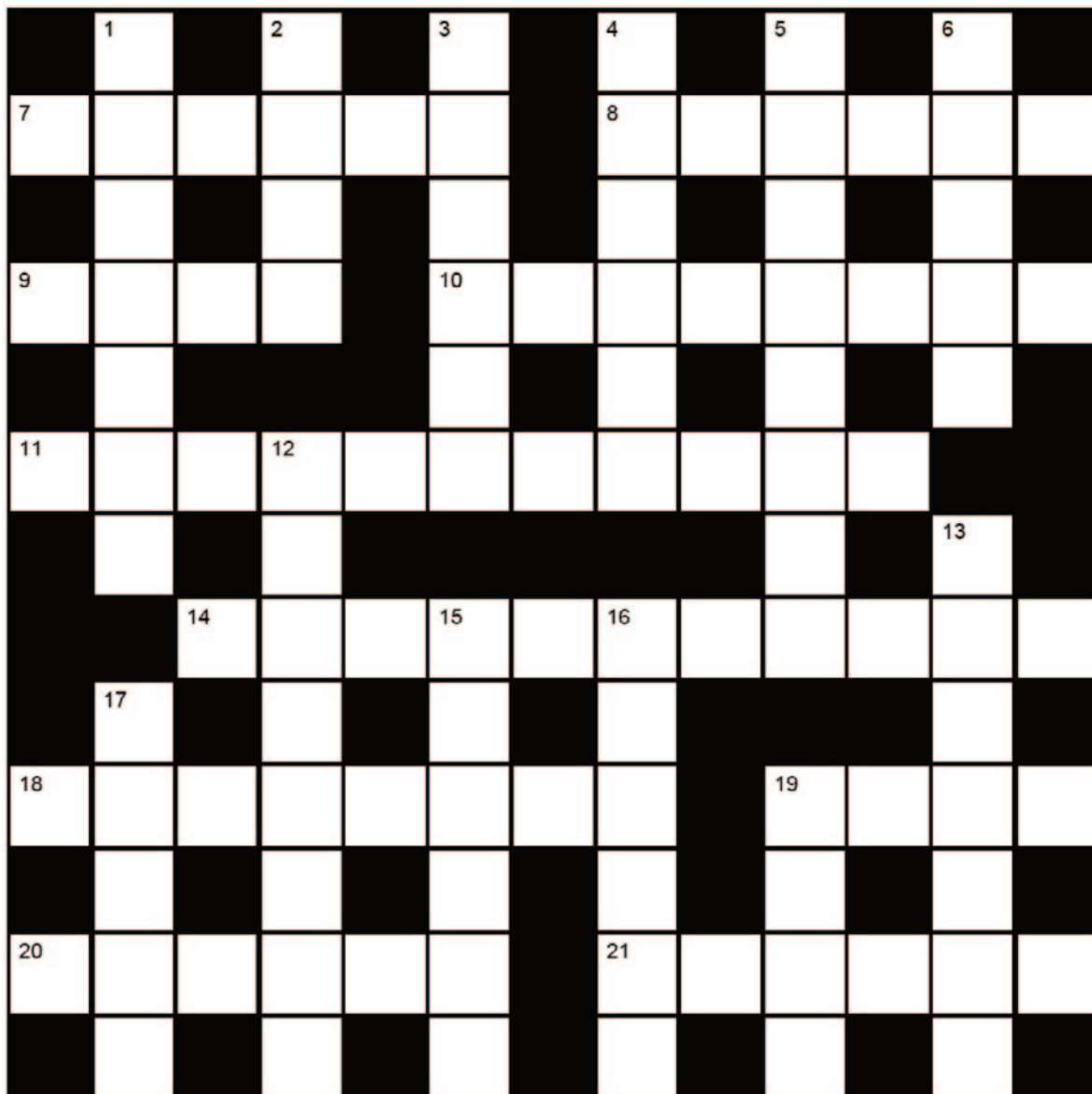
Finally, the measures designed to reduce the cost of using public services in areas such as public transport and in education and health are welcome. Over the longer-term these types of measure should be greatly expanded. Free or subsidised universal public services available to all are fundamental to any coherent long-term strategy for reducing cost-of-living pressures.

Ultimately budget 2025 will be remembered as a lost opportunity when we could have grappled with the crises in childcare, housing, and numerous other areas but failed to do so.

Tax cuts now will eventually push higher taxes on to future and younger workers. We will soon need to grapple with the fiscally costly megatrends of an ageing population and green transition as well as a swathe of other challenges

Crossword

As **CSQ** is currently being published **online only**, 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.



Crossword set by Peter Connaughton

Across

- 7. See 6 down (6)
- 8. Deficient in quantity or quality (6)
- 9. William Michael Albert Broad aka Billy (4)
- 10. S/he could be from Kigali (8)
- 11. He is the Head Coach of the Ireland rugby team (5,6)
- 14. Character played by Joaquin Phoenix in 2019 movie (6,5)
- 18. In geology, masses of rocks and sediment carried down and deposited by glaciers (8)
- 19. Indonesian island, popular tourist destination (4)
- 20. Wile E. - Looney Tunes character (6)
- 21. Snow houses (6)

Down

- 1. The result of multiplying two or more numbers (7)
- 2. In military parlance, not where you should be (1,1,1,1)
- 3. A celestial winged being with human, animal, or birdlike characteristics (6)
- 4. To preserve a corpse from decay (6)
- 5. High ranking member of the Catholic Church (8)
- 6. And 7 across - It is measured in kg of Dry Matter/hectare/day (5)
- 12. Perennial herb used for culinary and medicinal purposes. (8)
- 13. Marine bivalve mollusk (7)
- 15. George Frederic, composer 1685-1759 (6)
- 16. The largest country in the world by area (6)
- 17. Detroit is known as The City (5)
- 19. Fluid that is made and released by the liver and stored in the gallbladder. (4)

CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS CSQ Summer 2024

ACROSS: 7. Manuka; 8. Acquit; 9. Baby; 10. Croziers; 11. Nemo Rangers; 14. Lee Van Cleef; 18. Valletta; 19. Joke; 20. Mirren; 21. Bantam
 DOWN: 1. Manatee; 2. Ruby; 3. Garcia; 4. Sarong; 5. Squirrel; 6. Libra; 12. Overlord; 13. Beckham; 15. Voting; 16. Nearby; 17. David; 19. Jane