

The fight for parity: How school secretaries and caretakers shook the country



**BREAST
CANCER
IRELAND**
researching a cure

FÓRSA

**Breast
Health**

Education
& Awareness

Awareness saves lives

Cornmarket, Breast Cancer Ireland and Fórsa have come together to promote breast health awareness & education to all Fórsa members.

To register your interest, email:
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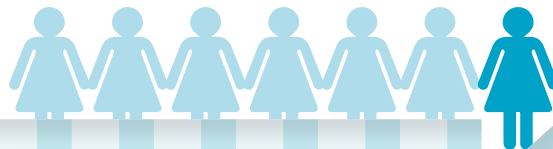


Did you know?*



**Most women
find a change
in their breast
themselves**

1 in 7 women will develop
breast cancer in
the course of their
lifetime*



39%

of women diagnosed with
breast cancer each year
are between the ages of

15 & 54*

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Message from the Chair

Let's build our union's strength together

Dear members,

Welcome to the latest edition of CSQ, your union's magazine for members in the civil service.

This is the first edition since I became Chairperson of the division at our conference in May, so I would like to begin by thanking you for your confidence in me. I am so proud to take the helm of the division along with vice chairs Cormac Donoghue and Darragh Fox, and all your DEC members.

In September Cormac and I were delighted to be part of the Fórsa delegation to the National Ploughing Championships in Scraggan, where we met so many members, both at the Fórsa stand and at all of the Department stands where so many of you were working. It was great to meet members while they're at work and talk to future members about all the benefits of being in the union.

Our union is a force for progressive change in our workplaces and in our lives. As civil servants we all go to work every day for the people of our country, doing our best to provide quality public services for all. Over the next two years I hope to build the strength of our union in the civil service, growing our membership so that we can achieve more for our members, together.

We have a new divisional strategy, *Playing Our Part, Together*, which will

help us in this task, but what we need most to build our union is you. Your skills and time are always welcome in your branch, so if you're not yet an active member, now is the time to become more involved.

In this edition of CSQ you can read the story behind the seven-day strike by our union colleagues in the Education division, when school secretaries and caretakers stood together to get the recognition and respect they deserve. It was inspiring to see our members organise and be so visible across the country.

We also have articles on changes to the civil service probation policy, the reform of the C&A scheme, attempts at deregulation by the EU Commission President, a report from the Ploughing Championships, a new economic model, as well as information on our new breast cancer awareness and education programme for members.

I hope you enjoy this edition of CSQ and look forward to working with all of you in the months and years ahead to continue to build Fórsa.

Jean Taylor

Chairperson
 Civil Service Division



Overview

Playing our part together

Conference adopts new strategic vision and plan

At divisional conference earlier this year delegates approved a new strategy for the division. The new strategy builds on *Reclaiming Our Place*, the division's first ever strategy, which ran from 2023-2025. Head of Division **Éamonn Donnelly** tells CSQ all about it

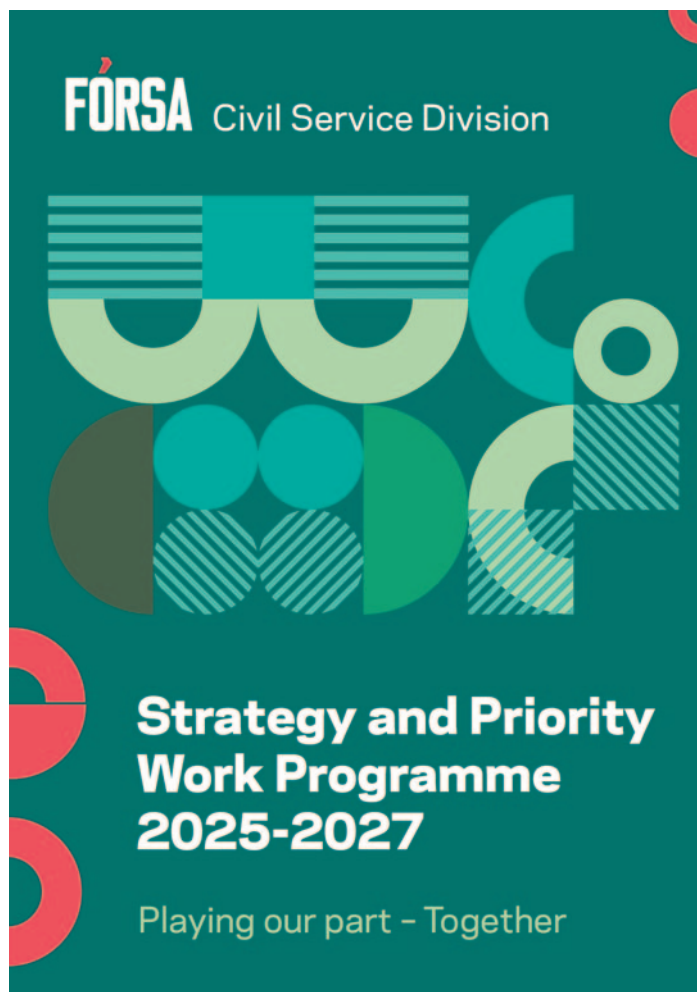
The Civil Service divisional conference in 2023 adopted, for the very first time, a divisional strategy. The adoption of that strategy arose from the 2022 Fórsa biennial conference adoption of the Fórsa Strategic Plan 2021 - 2025.

Reclaiming Our Place set about pursuing the creation of an environment where the Civil Service, as an employer, could once again become a leading employer of choice, in a very competitive and tight labour market, through the introduction of progressive workplace policies.

We have had significant success in this regard, in areas such as menopausal welfare, support for victims of domestic violence, and the right to disconnect. In relation to the industrial relations system, we are now on the cusp of a new era in Civil Service industrial relations, and a completely re-modelled and 'fit-for-purpose' Conciliation & Arbitration Scheme will be launched soon.

Considering all of this, the Civil Service DEC decided to retain the three core foundation pillars of *Reclaiming Our Place* as the core foundation pillars of the new divisional strategy for 2025-2027.

However, while the new strategy continues to target industrial relations and policy priorities, there is a greater effort to increase not only the number of workers who join and become organised members of Fórsa, and those who become interested in participating in the union on workplace issues which affect them. This is the surest way to



build our power, represent workers and deliver fair outcomes in the years ahead.

We have already seen evidence of senior management decisions being made to test our mettle and our ability to respond effectively in the attempts to unilaterally alter blended working arrangements and open up HEO recruitment without consultation or agreement. We were able to resist these moves by having the collective resolve to take

appropriate action.

However, this is only sustainable in the medium to longer term if we significantly increase the density of our union membership, a goal we are very much capable of achieving.

The last census indicated that there were now 52,000 civil servants employed. Of that number, 40,000 are in posts and grades represented by Fórsa. Our divisional membership has grown to over 25,000 members; however, there is lots more to do in order to reach our potential. Part of this strategy is to put systems in place - not only to increase the number of members but to make us more effective in leveraging the power we have.

Simply put, this strategy is about finding ways to make us stronger, in order to improve our ability to deal with the challenges we face, by playing our part, together.

I would like to thank the CSDEC committee members and officers for their continued support and commitment to seeing us on the right pathway. I would also like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the Fórsa Civil Service staff team in putting this strategy and work programme together.

FUTURE VISION
Éamonn Donnelly



The three foundation pillars are:

- 1. Recruitment and organising**
- 2. Industrial relations and policy**
- 3. Communications**



Picture: Pexels



THE NEXT STAGE Fórsa hopes the new probation policy, set to be introduced early next year, will act as a bridge to the future and not a hindrance to career progression

Probation overhaul planned

Training for managers, ongoing review of the policy and an agreed model of analysis will be critical to ensuring staff are given the best possible chance to pass probation. CSQ Editor **Hannah Deasy** reports on the revamped civil service probation policy set to be introduced next January

A comprehensive new probation policy for the civil service is close to being finalised, ahead of its planned introduction in January 2026. The new policy is the result of extensive engagement with the staff panel of unions, which followed a claim brought forward by Fórsa in 2023.

In the new policy, probation must be confirmed at six months, with a formal confirmation to follow at nine months. This will ensure that probation in the civil service complies with the Whelan Judgement from 2023 and the 2022 transposition of the EU Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working into Irish law. Both state that probation in the public service can never last beyond 12 months.

Deputy general secretary and head of the civil service division Éamonn Donnelly said: "The new policy, if applied correctly, will put forward a fairer system, outlining clear timelines and measures to ensure that everyone has a better chance of passing

their probation. We have made strides in ensuring this system is fair. The clear timelines will mean that when appeals are necessary, they can take place without undue delay. Also, appeals will continue to be conducted by the Civil Service Appeals Board, as had previously applied.

He continued: "There was an attempt by the official side to change this, but we pushed back and are pleased that the current system, where nominees from the union side and the management side participate in the appeals board, will continue. Appeals by new hires will continue to be heard by internal appeals officers."

Éamonn pointed out that training for line managers would be "critical" in ensuring that "everything was done" to help workers pass their probation.

He added: "We want to embed a culture where people are enabled to fulfil their potential during the probationary period. The new six-month system will be split into three

stages of two months. This will make it easier to flag issues in a timely fashion."

The civil service is unique in that workers can be on probation on multiple occasions throughout their careers, as it is applicable both when initially hired, and then after any subsequent promotion.

Éamonn continued: "We believe there is a higher incidence of internally promoted staff not passing probation than traditionally was the case. This needs to be addressed. It doesn't make any sense that after investing hundreds of thousands in a person's development, they then wouldn't be supported properly in the transition to a new job."

To address this, unions decided to seek an agreed model of analysis for probation outcomes, at a staff panel meeting on Wednesday 8th October. Currently the figures available are only baseline figures that state the number of workers who pass or do not pass probation.

Éamonn explained: "We need a full picture so that we can make sure workers are getting a fair chance. After the new policy is launched, we will keep it under constant review to ensure it meets its aims and contributes to building a supportive culture in the civil service."

Conference Report



'We must protect the progress we've made – and go further'

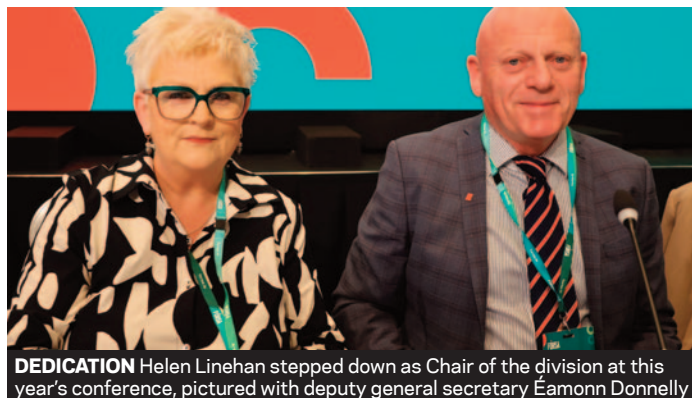
Brendan Kinsella

Fórsa Communications

It was a busy two-and-a-half days for delegates at the Civil Service Conference this year. With almost 100 motions debated, a new divisional executive committee (DEC) elected, and a new strategy for the next two years adopted, delegates managed to fit a lot of work into a short amount of time.

Well renowned as one of Ireland's most lively cities, Galway became even livelier from Wednesday 24th May to Friday 26th May, as the city played host to delegates from across the island. With representatives from each of the division's branches and every section of the civil service in attendance.

Helen Linehan (Cork General Clerical Branch) stepped down from her role as chair of the division, passing the torch to



new chair, Jean Taylor (Revenue Clerical Branch).

Helen was thanked for her leadership, fairness, and dedication to members. She in turn paid tribute to members, the DEC and staff and wished the new DEC the very best for the future.

Deputy general secretary and head of the Civil Service division Eamonn Donnelly embodied that hope for new leadership and

gratitude for those stepping down when he said: "Led by your new chair Jean Taylor and vice chairs Cormac Donoghue and Darragh Fox this division will go from strength to strength and build upon the outstanding work of Helen Linehan, Sue Kelly and Darragh Fox."

With the new leadership comes a new strategy, *Playing Our Part - Together*. Delegates voted to accept the strategy

which, among other things, will see a civil service staff team project set up. The project will aim to increase union density in the civil service, through targeted and strategic organising.

Delegates displayed great stamina through marathon debating sessions as they considered and voted upon close to 100 motions.

Motions touched on a wide variety of issues including blended work, pay, mobility, and grading, as well as diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

As a topic of great importance to members, motions on blended work dominated debate on the first day of conference. Delegates spoke at length about how blended work has impacted their lives for the better, and the drastic impact unfairly refused requests to work from home can have upon morale.

Continued page 7

Conference report

SUPPORT FROM THE FLOOR Standing ovation for a delegate after she gave a moving account of her recent ADHD diagnosis



Delegates gave a standing ovation to a member who movingly told of how her recent ADHD diagnosis had helped her. She told delegates: "I'm intelligent, I'm strong, and I'm resilient – and I've known this since I was diagnosed with ADHD two years ago. I support this motion, but I also believe it's important to work with the union to explain what ADHD is and raise awareness."

This year's conference would be the last for Betty Tyrell-Collard (Dublin Central Branch) before her well-earned retirement this year.

Betty received both a Distinguished Service Award and Honorary Life Membership of Fórsa. Kevin Callinan presented the awards to Betty and paid tribute to her many elected roles including as Vice President of Fórsa, President of the CPSU, President of the Dublin Council of Trade Unions and as a member of the ICTU Executive Committee. He also noted that in 51 years of service Betty saw 42 Ministers come and go from her Department on Kildare Street.

Thanking delegates and the DEC past and present Betty said: "This division is my home, and it was always my home. I've gotten to know a lot of people over the years, and I'm delighted that there's a new generation of people coming through to represent members."

Also receiving Distinguished Service Awards were: Carmel Cotter (Revenue Clerical Branch), Audrey Lyons (DAFM Executive Grades Branch), James Higgins (DAFM Executive Grades Branch), Mary Dunne (Portlaoise CS Clerical), Colm Henry (Justice Executive Grade), John Healy (Tipperary General Branch), George Lynch (Architecture, Engineering and Heritage Services), Miko Sheridan (Agriculture Food & Marine No.1), and Steve Pilgrim (Ordnance Survey).

As conference closed Éamonn Donnelly praised delegates for their hard work over the course of the two-and-a-half days. He said: "The motions passed by conference will shape our work over the next two years and I would like to thank delegates for their hard work drafting and speaking on motions."



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS

Back row: Miko Sheridan, Paula Gilman (accepting for John Healy), James Higgins, Kevin Melinn, Seán Kirwan (accepting for George Lynch), Front row: Mary Dunne, Carmel Cotter, Fórsa President Martin Walsh, Audrey Lyons, Sorchá Byrne (accepting for Colm Henry), and Steven Pilgrim

punitive and unfair manner in which blended working requests are sometimes responded to, and urged delegates to support the motion, saying, "We must protect the progress we've made—and go further."

As civil service workers face a wide variety of issues, debate around blended working gave way to other motions.

Hazel Menton of the Archivists Branch brought forward a motion on the protection of grading structures for professional and technical grades. Hazel is a member of the National Professional and Technical Committee (NPTC) which is an Equivalent Grades Committee, working to represent professional and technical grades in the civil service.

During the debate on Motion 33, delegates displayed the care and solidarity the union movement is built upon. The motion itself called for the establishment of disability, neurodiversity and chronic illness policies within the civil service.



WELL DESERVED Fórsa stalwart Betty Tyrell-Collard receives her Honorary Life Membership award from general secretary Kevin Callinan

From page 6

Gary Fagan of the DSP Executive Branch told delegates that blended working had become an essential part of how many in the civil service operate. He said: "It's our responsibility to ensure that these arrangements are secured in the long term. It's working for members; it's working for services and it's working for the State. We must stand for

evidence-based policies, not a rushed return to outdated ways."

Olasubomi Oyenuga, from the Longford General Clerical Branch, said blended work was about respect, fairness, and the kind of civil service we want to build. She talked about the



TAKING THE REINS
New Chair Jean Taylor

Retirement

Farewell to Paul after 30 years of dedication and service

Brendan Kinsella

Fórsa Communications

This October, the civil service division says farewell to AGS Paul Moyer, who has retired after more than 30 years' service. First joining CPSU in 1993 when he started as a clerical assistant in the Department of Finance, Paul immediately became involved as a union activist.

Being part of a union came naturally to Paul. He told CSQ: "It's always been an interest of mine to be a voice for people who didn't know what to do or what to say. When I started working back in the 1980's, I worked in the Batchelors factory in Cabra, and I was a shop steward. So, when I started in the Department of Finance I knew I had to get involved with the committees."

Since his first day, Paul became more and more involved with union work, first as a seconded secretary with the PSEU in 2014, then as an Industrial Relations Officer in 2017, and, following the formation of Fórsa, stepping into the role of assistant general secretary in 2022.

He said: "I could see the tremendous work my colleagues were doing, both on the industrial and admin sides of the house. It made me want to do more, and thanks to their support I was able to."

For Paul, the work has always been about the members. He said: "I deal with a lot of confidential issues. The cases can be traumatic. You have to make sure the members are supported."

He proudly displays the thank you cards he receives on a shelf in his office.

"They mean the most to me. A few are from cases that didn't go our way, but the members still felt they wanted to say thanks. Those let you know there's more to it than just winning or losing."

Paul gives credit to the reps on the ground for enabling him to do his work.

"I had a moment, when I looked at the ad for my replacement, and I thought to



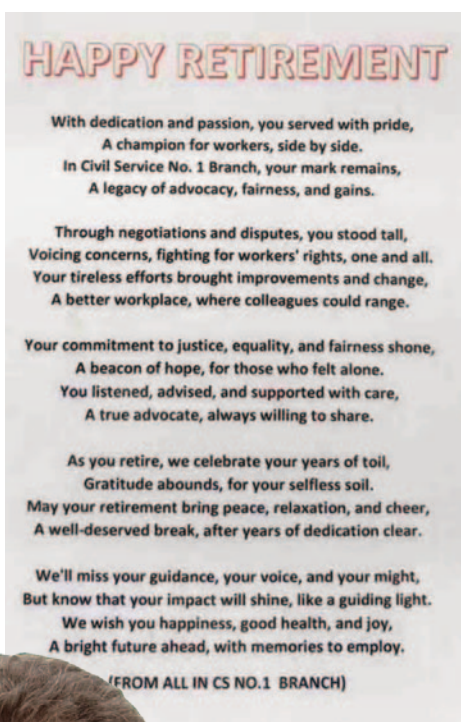
RESULTS Paul checking tallies for the civil service DEC election in 2018



HIGH ESTEEM Civil Service No 1 Branch shirt and poem



GOOD CAUSE Paul (centre) holding a €1,000 donation with fellow volunteers from the Wexford Marine Watch suicide prevention group



myself 'Really? Did I do all that?' I don't think it would've been possible without having reps I can rely on." He continued: "I always made time for my reps. If they needed to know about a policy, I always made sure to take



NEW DAWN Paul with union colleagues at the launch of Fórsa

the time to explain everything. It means they can do a better job; I can rely on them, and they know they can rely on me."

Paul's work as AGS was defined by his strong relationship with his reps, supporting them in both their work and their development.

His efforts have been appreciated by the branches he served. During a farewell dinner with the Civil Service Number One Branch, he was presented with a personalised jersey and a poem written by reps.

He said: "It was unexpected and very touching. I have it framed and hanging up now. When someone takes the time to write a poem for you, you know you're appreciated."

As Paul goes into retirement, he is happy to pass the torch. "I always wanted to leave things in a better place for members than I found it, and I hope I've done that. Now it's for others to do the same."

He added: "I always encourage people to get involved, even locally at branch level. It's a privilege to make the world a better place, and getting involved with a union is one of the best ways to do that."

FOCUSED ON REPS
AGS Paul Moyer

On Tuesday 14th October Fórsa assistant general secretary **Paul MacSweeney** addressed the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Irish language, the Gaeltacht and the Irish-speaking community. He presented Fórsa's observations on recruitment in the public service considering the provision in the Official Languages (Amendment) Act which requires 20% of recruits in the public service to have competency in the Irish language by 2030. This is what he said in his opening statement to members of the Committee...

Cur chuige dearfach i leith úsáid na Gaeilge i seirbhísí poiblí

A Chathaoirigh, a Leaschathaoirigh, agus baill den choiste,

Gabhaim buíochas libh as bhur gcuireadh chun tuairimí Fhórsa d'earcaíocht sa tseirbhís phoiblí a chur i láthair ag tabhairt aird ar an bhforáil in Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla a éilíonn go mbeadh cumas maith Gaeilge ag 20% d'earcaigh sa tseirbhís phoiblí. Is aidhm leis an bhforáil sin a chinntiú go bhfuil teacht ag an bpobal ar sheirbhísí dátheangacha i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla agus go mbeidh an Stát in ann a chuid seirbhísí a chur ar fáil go héifeachtach sa dá theanga.

Tacaíonn Fórsa go hiomlán le tionscnaimh a chuireann ar chumas oibrithe úsáid a bhaint as an nGaeilge, ina saol gairmiúil agus ina saol sóisialta. Cuirimid fáilte roimh thuilleadh úsáide agus taitnime a bheith á baint as ár teangacha náisiúnta inár láithreacha oibre agus inár bpobail chomh maith le hoibrithe a bheith ag cur lena gcuid Gaeilge agus ag éirí níos líof, dhá rud a bhfuilimid ag súil go mór leo freisin.

Tá ár gceardchumann ag tacú lenár dteanga a chur chun cinn le fada an lá. Rithimid Scéim Gaeltachta Fhórsa gach bliain, rud a chuireann ranníocaíocht ar fáil i leith táillí Gaeltachta a bhíonn le hóc ag leanaí, agus rinneamar leathnú ar an scéim i mbliana ionas go mbeidh níos mó teaghlaigh in ann leas a bhaint as an scéim. Chuireamar feachtas ar bun freisin chun cúrsaí Gaeilge a chur ar fáil sa Ghaeltacht do státseirbhísigh a mbeadh fonn orthu Gaeilge a úsáid ina gcuid oibre.

Anois ós rud é go bhfuil sprioc dhlithiúil ann go mbeadh cumas sa teanga ag 20% d'earcaigh san earnail phoiblí, ba mhaith linn a chinntiú go mbeadh rochtain chóir dhóthanach ag ár mbaill ar oiliúint. D'fhéadfaí go n-áireofaí leis sin fáil a bheith ar chúrsaí Gaeilge agus am saor le pá óna gcuid gnáthdhualgas chun a gcuid foghlama agus a gcuid uasailiúna sa teanga a éascú ionas go mbainfidh siad amach an cumas atá ag teastáil.

Tá an sprioc atá leagtha amach sa dlí uailmhianach. Mar sin féin, is údar imní é nach bhfuil rannpháirtíocht ná idirbheartaíocht fhiúntach ag gabháil ar



aghaidh leis na ceardchumainn, go háirithe i bhfianaise na n-impleachtaí a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ann don lucht oibre atá ann faoi láthair. Ní dheachaigh an rialtas i gcomhairle le Fórsa, cé gurb é an ceardchumann is mó é a dhéanann ionadaíocht ar oibrithe san earnail phoiblí, nuair a bhíodas ag ullmhú an Phlean Náisiúnta do Sheirbhísí Poiblí as Gaeilge, ná don Phlean Gníomhaíochta do 2025-2027 atá ar na bacáin.

Tá a fhios againn gur ag thart ar 11% den tseirbhís phoiblí atá an cumas a bhfuil gá leis chun a gcuid oibre a dhéanamh i nGaeilge faoi láthair. Cuireadh béim ar an taidhe seo sa Phlean Náisiúnta do Sheirbhísí Poiblí as Gaeilge a rinne Ollscoil na Gaillimhe. Tá a fhios againn chomh maith

ó fhigiúirí an daonáirimh, nach labhraíonn ach níos lú ná 2% den daonra an Ghaeilge ar bhonn laethúil.

Aontaímid go diongbháilte gur chóir go mbeadh an rogha ag daoine fáil a bheith acu ar seirbhísí poiblí inár dteanga náisiúnta. Mar sin féin, ní mór go mbeadh éileamh ar sheirbhísí poiblí le go ndéanfaí soláthar orthu, ar gné é atá aitheanta sa Phlean Náisiúnta freisin. Mar sin féin, níl an chuma ar an scéal go bhfuil aon sonraí ar fáil chun an méid éilimh atá ag úsáideoirí seirbhíse feadh na hearnála poiblí faoi láthair a aithint.

Caithfidh aon dearadh ar chleachtais earcaíochta a d'fhéadfadh srian nó teorainn

a chur le deiseanna fostaíochta do dhaoine aonair nach bhfuil cumas sa Ghaeilge acu a bheith bunaithe ar fhianaise agus nasctha le héileamh seirbhíse.

Ina theannta sin, ní mór idirbheartaíocht a dhéanamh idir ceardchumainn agus an fostóir ar aon bhearta earcaíochta a bhféadfadh tionchar diúltach a bheith acu ar ár mbaill trína ngluaiseacht laistigh den tseirbhís phoiblí a theorannú nó trína rochtain ar dheiseanna ardú céime a laghdú.

Tacaíonn ár mbaill le cur chuige dearfach, bunaithe ar réitigh chun cur le húsáid na Gaeilge agus le caighdeán na seirbhísí poiblí as Gaeilge. Mar sin féin, níor chóir go ndéanfaí faillí ar an lucht oibre diongbháilte atá san earnail phoiblí faoi láthair agus a oibríonn go cruia, chun an cuspóir tábhachtach seo a bhaint amach.

Iarraimid ar an Rialtas mar sin dul i dteagmháil láithreach le ceardchumann maidir leis an ábhar agus molaimid go láidir don Choiste seo an moladh sin a chur os comhair an Rialtais.

Sula dtagaimid chun críche, ba chóir dúinn aird a tharraingt ar an mbagairt ciníochais agus ar an dearcadh frithimírceach atá ag dul i méid ar ár sráideanna. Agus nuair a bhíonn ciníochas ar ár sráideanna, beidh sé le fáil inár láithreacha oibre freisin.

Ba chóir d'earcaíocht san earnail phoiblí a féachaint le dul i ngleic le héagathroime chiníochais agus éagsúlacht agus cuimsiú a chur chun cinn ar feadh na sochaí. Is éard atá i gceist le cuimsiú dáiríre ná timpeallacht a chruthú go réamhghníomhach ina mbeidh gach duine in ann a bheith rannpháirteach. Sa chomhthéacs sin, tá freagracht ar an Stát a chinntiú go gcruthaíonn sé deiseanna cothroma do na seirbhísí poiblí atá ann agus a bheith ann chun seirbhísí an stáit a sheachadadh sa dá theanga, iad siúd nach raibh aon taidhí acu roimhe seo ar an teanga san áireamh.

Táimid ag súil le hoibriú leis na páirtithe ábhartha chun tacú le cuspóirí Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla a sheachadadh, agus gabhaim buíochas libh arís as bhur gcuireadh chun an cur i láthair seo a thabhairt inniu.

Go raibh maith agabh.

Have you joined your union yet?

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New C&A scheme ready by end of year

Picture: Pexels

Hannah Deasy

CSQ Editor

After two years of discussions between unions and the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (DPER), an end is in sight, with reform of the conciliation and arbitration scheme (C&A) nearly complete.

Deputy general secretary and head of the civil service division Éamonn Donnelly said: "We set out to achieve a similar set of standards for industrial relations in the civil service as those that exist for all other workers in the country."

"We are close to completing the much-needed reform of the C&A scheme, and I'm confident that we will soon reach agreement on the sole remaining issue."

While processes and pathways will need to be drafted, all other elements of the scheme have been agreed. There will be a new 'fit-for-purpose' grievance procedure, with a pathway to external adjudication if internal resolution cannot be reached, there will be an independent chair of the General Council appointed by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), and there will be a dispute resolution procedure with a role for the WRC in facilitation of trade disputes.

The issue that remains under discussion relates to the timeline for exchange of



statements. Éamonn explained that the union side would prefer to move to simultaneous exchange of statements, as fixed timelines would allow for timely resolution of grievances, but the official side would prefer to retain the current system of statements and counter-statements.

He said: "It's too hard to police or enforce a

system with no timelines. However, we would be prepared to consider a solution where a fixed date is agreed for arbitration, with statements exchanged in advance. In that way, we would ensure that issues are brought to a conclusion while they remain relevant."

Éamonn concluded: "This has been a huge body of work. The current scheme is decades out of date. It was written on a typewriter for a bygone era, it's no longer appropriate for the modern-day workplace. The new scheme will be straightforward, fair, and easy to navigate."

"It will be accompanied by a 'user guide' to make sure anyone who needs to use the scheme can understand it."

Bereaved Partners Bill becomes law

In July the Social Welfare (Bereaved Partners and Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025 passed both Houses of the Oireachtas and was signed into law by the President.

This legislation extends eligibility to the current Widow's, Widower's and Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension to qualified cohabitants in Ireland.

This Bill came as a result of a Supreme Court judgment in January 2024, which found in favour of the applicant, Johnny O'Meara, and his children, when it overturned a previous decision to refuse him a Widower's Contributory Pension on the grounds that he and his deceased partner were not married. In its ruling the Supreme Court acknowledged that a legislative change was required to resolve the issues raised by its judgment.

The eligibility for the payment

Picture: Pastor Sam (CC BY 3.0)



will now be extended to 'qualified cohabitants' who have been in an intimate and committed relationship for a period of two years if they have children, or five years if they do not.

The scheme will now be known as the Bereaved Partner's (Contributory) Pension to reflect the more inclusive nature of the payment.

Fórsa official Catriona Oates said: "This piece of legislation is

important in two ways. Not only does it recognise the diversity of Irish families today, but it also puts these families on an equal footing. For too long, couples who decided not to marry, and their children, were treated unfairly and this legislation rectifies that."

Payments will commence from the date of the Supreme Court judgment, 22nd January 2024, or later if the death is after this date. People will have

six months from the date of enactment (21st July) to make a claim where the death occurred before that date.

The following schemes will also be amended to include qualified cohabitants:

- **Widow's, Widower's and Surviving Civil Partner's (Non-Contributory) Pension** - This is a means tested payment if the PRSI condition isn't satisfied and payable where there are no dependant children.

- **Widowed or Surviving Civil Partner Grant** - This is a once-off payment of €8,000 to widows, widowers, surviving civil partners and surviving cohabitants with dependent children.

- **Death Benefit Scheme under the Occupational Injuries Scheme** - Payable if an insured person dies because of an accident at work or from a disease that is related to their work.

Well-being

The **Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS)** has produced a new leaflet *Wired for Calm* explaining the central role played by the Vagus nerve in regulating how we react to stress and suggesting a few helpful strategies for dealing with life's little curveballs

The Vagus nerve is like a motorway, but a sensory motorway. It allows our brain to communicate with the body and understand what is going on in the body at any given time.

The Vagus nerve transports information such as our heart rate, blood pressure, digestion, temperature, etc to our brain, for our brain to interpret and decide if we are safe or in danger. The brain then sends its own information back down through the body as a result.

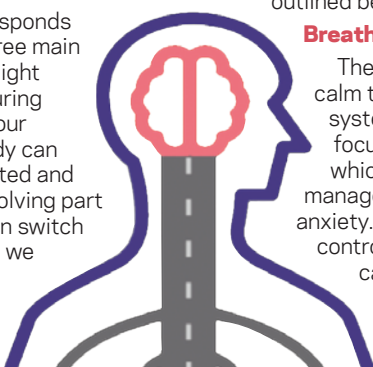
If our body picks up on danger through our senses, our internal cues or even observing others, it can set off an internal alarm and cause our nervous system to activate, pushing us to fight/flight or shut down.

The Vagus nerve is an essential part of the calming nervous system, which helps with the aftermath of fight-or-flight.

Feeling stressed, noticing the anxiety levels are rising? Has a deadline been pushed forward? A difficult email just come in? A staff member handed in their notice?

Our brain responds to stress in three main ways – fight, flight and freeze. During these states, our brains and body can feel dysregulated and the problem-solving part of our brain can switch off. So how do we switch it back on?

Try some of



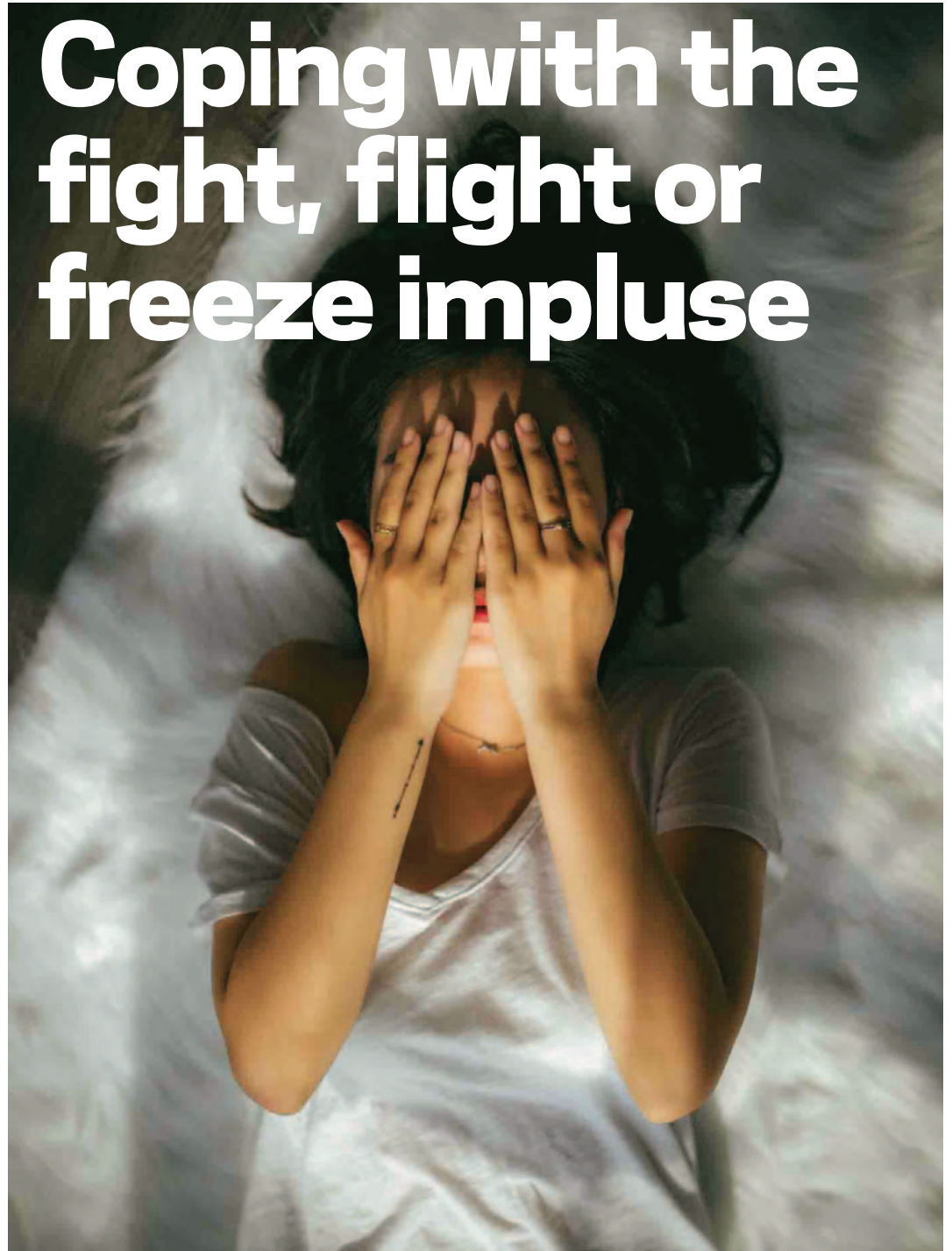
Picture: Unsplash

the grounding techniques outlined below...

Breathing exercises

These can help to calm the nervous system and bring the focus to the present, which can help to manage stress and anxiety. Consciously controlling our breath can shift your body from a fight-or-flight to a more relaxed state.

Coping with the fight, flight or freeze impluse



Here are a few helpful exercises:

The 4-7-8 Technique:

Breathe in for four seconds, hold for seven seconds and exhale for eight seconds. Repeat four to six times, or as many a necessary. Adjust if needed for your own comfort - just make sure your exhale breath is longer than your inhale breath.

Balloon Breathing: This is useful for visual individuals; pick a colour of a balloon, if comfortable, close your eyes or lower your gaze. Imagine your

balloon is at the bottom of the your stomach. As you exhale, visualise inflating the balloon by pushing your stomach out... PAUSE... deflate the balloon slowly by exhaling.

Remember to stick a notice beside your kettle or on your fridge to remind yourself to take a few deep breaths throughout the day.

Cognitive Distraction

Sometimes when stressed, our brains can react and respond as

Continued page 13

Pictures: Pexels

**BREATHE EASY** The 4-7-8 technique

From page 12

if we are in danger even when we are not. Firstly, try asking yourself, 'am I unsafe?' or 'am I uncomfortable?'

If uncomfortable, we need to attempt to come back into a neutral state to allow our rational and problem-solving part of our brain to reactivate. To do this we may need to break away from the stressor and think of something else. Try some of these exercises:

Pick up an object and describe it in detail: look at it, describe its colour, texture, size, weight, scent, and any other qualities you notice – try this two or three times.

Make a list: for example, list all your friends'/neighbours' cars, visualise and name the different types.

Think of your favourite dish to cook: talk yourself through the steps of making it - from start to finish.

Remember, stepping away from the stressor can help to break the cycle of stress and possibly provide some perspective on the issue.

Ground the Body

Our body works in sync with our brain. If the body is experiencing changes to it, including increased heart rate, a change in temperature or even a rise in blood pressure, our brain can interpret these changes as a

**A IS FOR APPLE** Describing objects**WATER THERAPY** A few slow sips

Picture: Unsplash

threat and react immediately.

By soothing our body and calming the nervous system, it can also help the brain to relax and regulate quicker. Here are a few ideas of how you can do this:

Water: have a few slow sips

of cold water, feeling the sensation of the cold water in your mouth and notice the sensation as you swallow.

Connect with your body: think about yourself in your chair right now, notice how your body connects with the chair and the places where your body makes

contact with it. Tense and release your shoulders, fists, or feet. Tense for five seconds and release.

Take your shoes off, place your feet on the ground, wriggle your toes. Notice how your sole and heel are connecting with the ground underneath.

Remember, like any other skill grounding takes practice. Practice regularly, and before you actually need it. Then, when you need to call upon this skill, you will have it, know it, and use it well.



The CSEAS is a dedicated service that offers a quality resource and support service for all staff in the Civil Service, which positively affects both individual health and well-being and organisational effectiveness. For additional information and upcoming webinars that may be of interest to you, please check out the CSEAS website at:

<https://www.cseas.per.gov.ie/#>

Check out CSEAS's *Wired for Calm* leaflet at:

<https://tinyurl.com/4bs6rsu4>

Moving towards a New Economic Model

NERI Co-Director **Dr Tom McDonnell** argues that Ireland's policymakers should take the 'high road' when framing future economic development by teaming highly-productive, well-paid jobs with quality social supports while steering clear of the 'low road' economic alternatives

The 2023 ICTU Biennial Delegate Conference in Kilkenny called on the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) to develop a new and comprehensive economic model of development for Ireland.

The global economy is entering into an era of instability and uncertainty and our economic policies are going to have to adjust if our economy and society are to flourish in this new reality.

The goals were to build a sustainable, prosperous and inclusive economy; avoid the booms and busts which have caused such pain, and protect people from the ups and downs of the international economy while recognising that engagement is critical.

There are many positive aspects to Ireland's economic performance. Ireland ranked 11th out of 193 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) in 2023, albeit flattered somewhat by the measure of output used.

Perhaps significantly the strong developmental welfare states of Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Denmark, Germany and Sweden rounded out the top six countries. Ireland ranked 7th in the IMD World competitiveness rankings in 2024 while the Global Peace Index ranks Ireland 2nd globally for safety and quality of life. Trust in public institutions exceeds the OECD average.

At the same time, the economy has been operating at close to full employment in recent years. In these and many other ways the economy and our institutions are relatively successful compared to that of most other countries around the world.



BUILDING RESILIENCE Shock-proofing the economy against 2008-style downturns

Picture: Unsplash

Nevertheless, the economy contains significant weakness which global economic turbulence and the four evolving mega-trends (rapidly ageing populations, climate catastrophe, de-globalisation and geopolitical rupture, and of course technological disruption including Artificial Intelligence) will ultimately expose.

These enormous challenges come on top of a number of immediate problems and challenges. Ireland has a skewed

two-tier economy. High living costs sit beside under-resourced public services.

Productivity levels in the domestic non-multinational sectors are generally weaker than in other Western European countries with important consequences for living standards.

The economy has repeatedly exhibited boom bust tendencies and our current pro-cyclical budgetary policies risk fuelling

There is a swathe of festering policy failures such as homelessness, housing, infrastructure delivery, and environmental degradation, while longer-term fiscal sustainability problems have yet to be adequately addressed

Picture: ICTU / Kevin Cooper, Photoline



FRESH THINKING Dr Tom McDonnell of NERI speaking at the ICTU BDC, Belfast, in July

another of these cycles.

There is also a swathe of festering policy failures in areas as diverse as homelessness and housing, infrastructure delivery, and environmental degradation, while the longer-term fiscal sustainability problems have yet to be adequately addressed.

While Ireland's economic model is not failing per se, we still need a new or at least revamped economic model to steer us through the turbulence and change of the 21st century.

It is in this context that the NERI and ICTU have been working to sketch out what a framework or 'New Economic Model' (NEM) for inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic progress in the 21st century might potentially look like. Specifically, we articulate an economic model based on four interconnected 'pillars' or goals defined as:

1. The productive economy

This is about the pursuit of inclusive and environmentally sustainable growth. It emphasises the importance of knowledge, new ideas and their diffusion, of education and skills, of investments in productive infrastructure, and in research and development (R&D).

Continued page 15

Picture: Pexels



From page 14

It also encompasses new institutional practices such as horizontal innovation through the democratisation of workplace relationships and promoting best enterprise practice, as well as business and organisational models that don't simply displace environmental or care costs elsewhere in the economy.

2. More and better jobs

This is about the pursuit of full employment with decent jobs for all. It emphasises policies that protect the labour market and workers from volatile swings, and policies that increase both the quality and quantity of labour supply and demand.

It encompasses the promotion of quality employment and increased participation, and the phasing out of low-road workplace practices. The 'good company' based on being a good and productive place to work should become the norm.

3. Economic and social security

This is about the pursuit of economic security throughout people's lives, reducing inequality, and abolishing poverty and deprivation.

It emphasises the importance of decent wages, of a proper social safety net based on social

insurance, of an adequate welfare system, and of the provision of universal basic services. Such policies support the 'high road' model of growth beyond the limits of the employing organisation.

4. Economic resilience

This is about the simultaneous pursuit of economic dynamism alongside fiscal, price and climate stability.

It emphasises the importance of providing suitable macro conditions to facilitate an 'anti-fragile' economic system based on economic dynamism, long-term gains in sustainable and green growth, and a foundation of resilience from foreseen challenges and unforeseen shocks.

Such shocks have historically had regular and significantly negative effects on workers, households and firms. We only need to think back to the trauma of the great financial crash and the austerity that followed. Proper policy design and system resilience is critical to defending the high road model of growth, employment and well-being.

Economic progress will require many tough choices and decisions, not least in the area of fiscal policy. The NEM reflects

Pictures: Pexels



SPARKING CHANGE Developing well-paid jobs in 'good companies'

on the type of policy suite that, in aggregate, could simultaneously achieve all four goals in the face of the looming mega-trends and other risks to the economy.

Overall, the NEM makes around 80 core propositions and proposals. At its heart, we are arguing that policymakers need to replace Ireland's current 'low-road' models of domestic economic development, based as it is on a particular form of competitiveness through cost reduction, low pay and precariousness.

Instead, we argue that policymakers should aim for a 'high-road' model of development based on highly productive well-paid jobs in 'good companies' embedded within top quality social supports and a robust economic and fiscal structure. Such a strategy requires a rethink and evolution of our existing enterprise strategy and the nature of economic supports provided.

Further reading...

- Check out New Economic Model policies on the ICTU website at: <https://www.ictu.ie/publications/new-economic-model>
- And more detailed policies on the NERI website at: <https://www.neriinstitute.net/our-work/new-economic-model>

LGBTQIA+



MARCH TOGETHER Cathal Kelly (centre) at the Trans and Intersex Pride march in July. Cathal has called on Fórsa members to join Pride marches to celebrate achievements and show solidarity



HUNGARY FOR CHANGE The 200,000 strong Pride march through Budapest

A season of summer **Pride** does Fórsa proud!

Brendan Kinsella

Fórsa Communications

This year marked Fórsa's second year formally taking part in Pride marches across the country under the union's own banner.

The summer Pride season started big with Dublin Pride, the most widely attended Pride event in Ireland. Taking place on Saturday 28th June, the parade would mark Fórsa's second time taking part in the parade. The first time being last year following the passing of the motion to set up a Fórsa LGBTQIA+ Network at Biennial Conference.

Union members joined over 12,000 people representing more than 280 organisations taking part in the parade through Dublin. The city was a riot of colour for the afternoon with thousands of revellers lining the pavements from start to finish along the route from O'Connell Street to Merrion Square.

Cathal Kelly, member of the civil service division, LGBTQIA+ Network, and a former editor of Gay



LOVE IS LOVE Fórsa had a strong official presence at both Dublin and Cork Pride marches



Community News magazine (GCN), marched with Fórsa again this year. Pride in 2025 is a very different creature to Cathal's first Dublin Pride in 1993. While Cathal welcomes the more festive atmosphere and wider participation, he still remembers Pride as a protest. To him, union participation in Pride is more than just about celebration. He called on members to join the Pride marches "both to

show the solidarity that is still needed and to celebrate the achievements we've all made together."

That same day, Fórsa official and LGBTQIA+ Network member, Aisling Cusack took part in Budapest Pride in defiance of the Viktor Orbán regime's Pride parade ban.

Aisling was part of the 200,000 people from across Europe who travelled to Budapest in support of Hungarian LGBTQIA+ people facing repression from the authoritarian state. She represented Fórsa as part of the European Public Services Union (EPSU) delegation, hosted by the Hungarian union VDSZ.

She said: "Trade unionists in Ireland have a proud history of fighting for LGBTQIA+ rights and equality both in the workplace and in society. It's incredibly important that our solidarity does not stop at our island's borders. Our solidarity must extend to all those facing the threat of persecution because of who they are."

Later in the summer, on Saturday 12th July, the LGBTQIA+ Network's first time at the Trans and Intersex Pride March would turn out to be a momentous one. The network was part of a dramatic increase in attendance, with over 10,000 people participating in the march which in previous years has drawn only a few thousand.

Fórsa official and LGBTQIA+ Network member, Danni Hickey was there on the day. She said: "It was an amazing atmosphere, and it's really heartening to see the turnout. Transphobia is growing, imported mostly from the US and UK. We have to stand up to it, for our trans friends, family members, and colleagues. Showing up to Trans and Intersex Pride is just one way we're saying 'no, not here.'"

The network's Pride season wrapped up with another first, this time attending Cork Pride, on Sunday 3rd August. The network laid down a marker for Prides outside the capital, with members revelling in the sun and celebrations through Patrick's Street and the city, whetting appetites and ambitions for next year.

If you wish to get involved with the LGBTQIA+ Network, as a member, an ally, or just to send a message of support, you can email lgbtqia@forsa.ie

New breast health programme launched for Fórsa members

A unique workplace-focused drive educating Fórsa members on breast health awareness is being rolled out across the country – with the potential to boost early cancer detection rates. CSQ Editor **Hannah Deasy** reports on this exciting new initiative

Fórsa, in partnership with Cornmarket and Breast Cancer Ireland, has launched a two-year breast health awareness and education programme for members.

The programme will be rolled out to Fórsa workplaces nationwide in a phased regional approach. Delivered by Breast Cancer Ireland's Outreach Coordinator Juliette O'Connell, the initiative will provide Fórsa members with free practical, engaging presentations on breast health, and the importance of early detection, along with information on the eight signs and symptoms of breast cancer to be aware of.

Juliette, herself a breast cancer survivor, with lived experience of the disease, will travel to Fórsa workplaces across Ireland with a medical mannequin, travelling in a distinctive pink Breast Cancer Ireland branded car, to deliver these education and awareness sessions in person. Sessions can be arranged at any time during the working day, making the programme as accessible, as possible, to all programme participants.

Aisling Hurley, CEO of Breast Cancer Ireland, explained how central Juliette's own experience is to the programme. She said: "Juliette's personal experience and expertise help bring the importance of early detection to life, empowering people with the knowledge to take action. Together, we can improve survival rates and support research that changes outcomes for future generations – and indeed become the generation that ends breast cancer once and for all."

Fórsa's senior vice president Julie Flood explained that raising awareness in workplaces is an extremely important step in assisting early detection and can also save lives.

"Breast cancer is the second most common cancer affecting women, and most women find a change in their breasts themselves."



HEALTH DRIVE CSD Chair Jean Taylor (centre) checks out the pink branded car which will be driven by Breast Cancer Ireland outreach coordinator Juliette O'Connell (left) to presentations across Ireland



She continued: "This initiative will educate our members on risk factors and symptoms, encourage self-examination, promote regular screenings and help to dispel myths about breast cancer."

Chair of the civil service division of Fórsa, Jean Taylor, encouraged branches in the civil service to book presentations. She told CSQ: "This is a great way to bring members together in the workplace, to pause from the

busyness of the day to day at work and think about our own health."

Members in the Sligo Pensions Office have already benefited from the programme, with the Fórsa PSO Clerical branch hosting sessions over two days, with more than 185 members attending. Branch chair Carmel Kennedy Mahon said: "The sessions were very informative, everyone said they learnt a lot. Setting them up was straightforward. I would encourage all branches to avail of this fantastic new initiative."

The presentation is free of charge and will be available in Fórsa workplaces nationwide. By contacting Alex Kelly in Breast Cancer Ireland, branches can book a session at a time and date that suits your workplace. Branches can invite members and colleagues to attend or could consider organising a session in conjunction with a branch Annual General Meeting (AGM).

● Fórsa members who wish to arrange a presentation in their workplace can do so by emailing alex@bciresearch.ie and forsa@bciresearch.ie

This initiative is being delivered to Fórsa members in partnership with Cornmarket Group Financial Services Ltd., and their longstanding partner Breast Cancer Ireland, making vital health education available directly to union members.

The sessions were very informative, everyone said they learnt a lot. Setting them up was straightforward. I would encourage all branches to avail of this fantastic new initiative

Industrial action

Voices from the school strike

As the dust settles on a seven-day strike by Fórsa school secretaries and caretakers, **James Redmond** looks back at the spirit and the sheer energy of the pickets and protests that shook the country

From mass rallies outside the Dáil and the Department of Education in both Dublin and Athlone, to pickets outside quiet rural schools and on busy urban streets, to the noisy new tactic of protesting outside politicians' constituency offices – everywhere it was the warmth of friends and family, the solidarity of other school workers, and the constant beeps of passing cars that kept morale sky high.

Nobody saw the scale of this movement coming. And yet here it was. Luisa Carty, Chair of the union's school secretaries branch didn't mince her words: "We're sending a very clear message to the Department of Education and the Department of Public Expenditure that we're not standing down, we're going to stay out outside our schools indefinitely.

"We are not giving up. We're here for the long haul, no doubt about it."

In Gort, one worker of 20 years has a pension already, but he was inspired by the rally in Dublin and travelled to Athlone to stand with colleagues. "Like if we were out sick for a day there's mayhem," he said.

At a school in Phibsboro, principal Ray Ryan standing on the picket with his colleagues Colette and Derek, told CSQ: "My school cannot run effectively without a caretaker or without a secretary. They're getting the message loud and clear now, and there's a lot of support outside the school this morning.

"Parents really, truly understand how important the role of a caretaker and secretary is." And outside the Department in Dublin, Elaine Finn put it plainly: "We're the only people in our school who are not



'WE'RE NOT GIVING UP' Luisa Carty, chair of the secretaries branch, at the DPER protest on 28th August



IN FULL VOICE Billy Kerins, campaigns officer of the caretakers branch, speaks to the crowd gathered outside DPER HQ in Molesworth Street on 28th August



recognised by the government as public workers. On a daily basis we liaise with the likes of the HSE, we do the online claim system. We deal with a lot of government agencies, and we are doing the job of public servants but are not recognised as such."

Her colleague Dominic, 32 years a caretaker and still working at the age of 82, said he loved his job - but the frustration in his voice was clear. His is the human cost of government neglect.

He said: "We work hard all year round. I'm first in the mornings and I'm last to leave."

The following week, after a day on school pickets, members assembled at government TDs' offices around the country, and at Leinster House in Dublin. Sharon Coady, who has been a school secretary for 18 years, spoke about what others take for granted: "There's parts of the job that nobody sees, that nobody values but we know we do a good job."

For her, much of the work is invisible, emotional labour. "Kids trust us and come to us when they need things. And the office is such a haven for children, which is important to me."

Picketing outside her school

Continued page 19

They have no pension at the end of it. It's disgraceful. Join a union. Stand together there's safety in numbers. Stand together. Shoulder to shoulder, one for all, all for one

Industrial action



PENSION PARITY NOW! During the 28th August protest more than 1,500 school secretaries and caretakers travelled to Dublin from across the country to deliver their demands to government

From page 18

in Marino, Jacinta Brady, a secretary with 32 years' service told CSQ: "I'd like to have some security at the end of it. We always preach equality, but we're not treated equally. And that's basically what we're calling for."

In Dunmore East, friends, family, and fellow staff joined a rain-soaked picket. Even the kids got involved, lining up like a football team and chanting "Pension! Pension! Pension!" with their secretary, Eileen O'Sullivan, at the centre.

A long-time organiser, she's had enough and it was a day clearly tinged with emotion.

She said: "We've been over 20 years trying to fight this injustice in our schools. I just came to work this morning, but for the first time in 31 years, I cried before I came up because it's a job I love, and I can't see why I should be out here on a picket asking for something that we are entitled to."

In Ferrybank, Waterford,



HIGH SPIRITS Strikers outside Leinster House on day four of the seven-day stoppage



JUST CAUSE Picket line outside the Department of Education

caretaker branch chair David Hearne was on the phone, buzzing as he co-ordinated pickets across the area. "It feels good," he said. "It feels good to know we're still going full steam ahead and we're not stopping anytime soon."

Back in Dublin, Marino caretaker Liam summing up the strength collective action has demonstrated, said: "It's bizarre that in this day and age that people can be expected to do so much, have no recourse, nothing."

"You know, they have no pension at the end of it. It's disgraceful. Join a union. Stand together there's safety in numbers. Stand together. Shoulder to shoulder, one for all, all for one."

Two decades of waiting, years of frustration, a campaign built over two years and a week of unstoppable action. A strike that nobody saw coming, but one that's already written itself into history. **In Numbers - page 20**

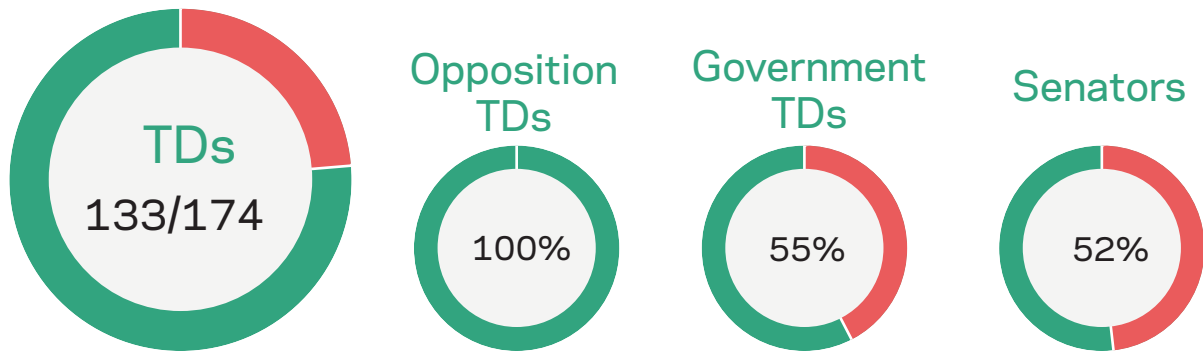
2,321 Secretaries and Caretakers on strike

1,927 Secretaries

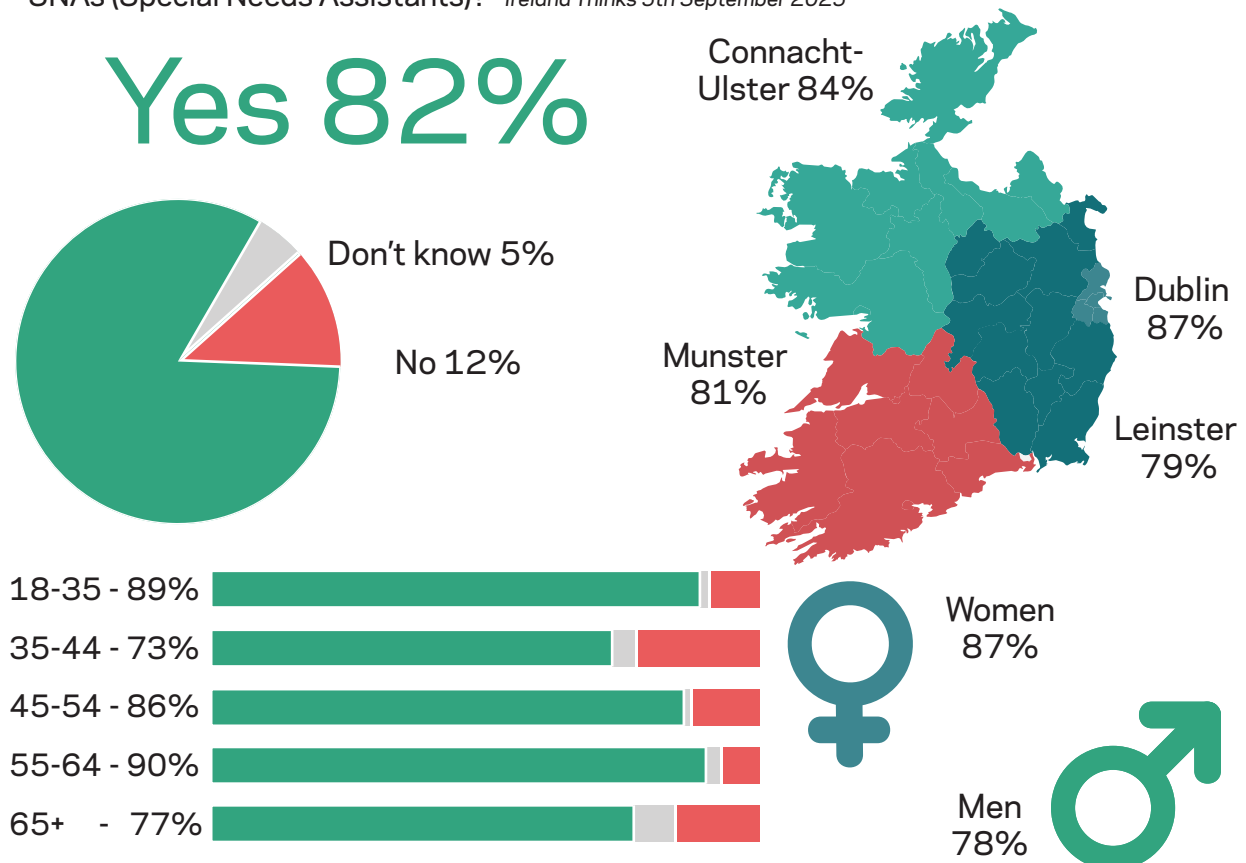
394 Caretakers

1,916 Schools

The campaign received widespread political support with most members of the Oireachtas signing the pledge of support.



"Do you support giving secretaries and caretakers the same employment benefits (such as pensions, sick leave, critical illness, and bereavement leave) as teachers and SNAs (Special Needs Assistants)?" *Ireland Thinks 5th September 2025*



Fórsa backs grassroots reform to deliver quality local services

Hannah Deasy

CSQ Editor

Fórsa has made a submission to the government's Local Democracy taskforce. The union has long fought for stronger local government and services for communities and has advocated for the inclusion of workers' perspectives in the taskforce's work.

In the submission Fórsa argued that the role and function of local authorities must be recalibrated to make sure they can meet their full potential in the delivery of quality services for communities.

The task force has been established to bring forward a programme of reform to improve the structure, funding, powers, and governance of local authorities, and is expected to deliver recommendations to the government within six to nine months.

Fórsa has consistently raised the need for reform that would empower local authorities, deliver for citizens, and support the workers who make services happen.

Head of the union's Local Government and Local Services and Municipal Employees' divisions Richy Carrothers said: "Today our local government is actively being degraded. Essential public services like housing, water, energy, and waste are being undermined and trust in our system of government is being eroded day by day.

"Fórsa is calling for a reform of local government which would enhance the provision of services to communities across Ireland while also strengthening democracy.

"Ultimately, this would entail an enhanced role of local government in effective service provision; in decision-making; and in rebuilding public confidence in democracy."

Picture: Uisce Éireann



A BASIC RIGHT Upgrading of water mains infrastructure. Fórsa has called for a referendum on the public ownership of water services

Director of campaigns Kevin Donoghue said: "In recent years various attempts by government to address the issues facing local democracy have been half-hearted and have often been derailed for political expediency, resulting in limited success.

"An opportunity exists now to develop more properly funded local authorities. As a union we will continue to advocate for strong local government and local services in Ireland."

Among the key recommendations made by Fórsa in its submission are calls for the full implementation of the EU charter on local self-government, an end to outsourcing, directly elected mayors with real power and funding,

the return of waste services to local authorities, increased funding, stronger regulation of wastewater and a constitutional referendum on the public ownership of water.

● Read the full submission at:
<https://tinyurl.com/5dmpf6vw>

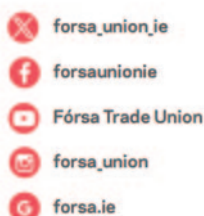


REFORM CALL
Richy Carrothers



FÓRSA

**Working for you
on all platforms**



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Fórsa Trade Union

forsa_union

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Fórsa Youth

Empowering young workers and giving them a voice in the union

Bridget Moylan

Public Relations Officer, Fórsa Youth

Fórsa Youth, the network for Fórsa members between 18 and 35, aims to empower young workers by promoting fairness at work, building solidarity, and making sure the issues that matter to younger generations are front and centre in union campaigns.

Through events, training, and campaigns, we support young members to get involved, develop skills, and play an active role in shaping both their workplaces and the wider society. Whether you're new to the workforce or already active in your union branch, Fórsa Youth is here to amplify your voice and strengthen our collective future. Want to join? Get your branch to nominate you as a youth rep and email youthsec@forsa-rep.ie

For this issue, Fórsa Youth reached out to its reps, and asked about the issues and questions they had that related to them and the union.

Is Fórsa doing anything about starting pay for lower civil service grades?

Our union negotiates fair pay agreements and campaigns for proper pay structures. Our union also pushes for training and promotion opportunities, so young workers aren't stuck in insecure or low-paid roles.

In the current Public Sector Pay Agreement, our union negotiated the inclusion of lump sum increases. For example, the first increase was 2.25% or a lump sum of €1,125 whichever is greater. This meant that the lowest paid workers would receive an increase of up to 4.25%. As young workers are more likely to be lower paid, these lump sum increases significantly benefitted young workers.

Housing is unaffordable for many of us — what is Fórsa doing to pressure the Government on this issue?

Our union is part of the Raise the Roof coalition, calling for stronger public investment in affordable housing, rent controls, and cost-of-living supports. We believe decent pay must be matched with affordable homes.

I am a proud Fórsa member, however, I find the whole thing complicated and hard to get involved...

Our union offers an introduction course to all



HAVE YOUR SAY Fórsa Youth provides a forum for young members to have their voices heard within the union

members. The course is an online information session, open to all members and delivered on the second Wednesday of every month in the morning (09:30 – 12:00) and in the evening (18:00 – 20:00).

The aim of this information session is to understand how important you are as a union member, encourage you to engage with your colleagues to

ON THE MARCH Fórsa chair Hugh McInerney (right) at May Day parade



achieve successful outcomes where you work, and learn how Fórsa operates and supports all our members and representatives to secure better workplaces. This should help with the union jargon and de-mystify how Fórsa works.

How can I get more involved in Fórsa?

By joining Fórsa, you are already an important part of our

union! There are many ways to get more involved. Contact your local branch to see if they need a local rep, or take part in your branch's AGM if you're looking to make a first step.

If you are more interested in matters outside workplace issues, Fórsa runs various campaigns. Be sure to keep an

Fórsa Youth



COLLECTIVE ACTION Fórsa Youth members highlighting their concerns at conference



YOUTH MATTERS Vice chair James Joy and recruitment officer Áine Bullock at the civil service conference



THE SOCIAL SIDE Members at a Fórsa Youth quiz



From page 22

eye on social media, the fortnightly bulletin, and the various networks.

How can younger voices influence union decisions?

Our union represents all members equally. Young voices are essential, and influence comes through local meetings, ballots, and reps. We encourage all members, but especially young people to get more involved at local level to get their voices heard! The more young people engage, the

Autumn/Winter 2025 **CSQ**

stronger our voices will be.

Be sure to check if your local branch has a youth rep. The Fórsa Youth network advocates for youth members and issues affecting young workers.

What does Fórsa offer young members?

Fórsa offers legal advice, financial services, insurance

and travel discounts, training, professional networking, and access to Fórsa campaigns and events to all members.

Not only does Fórsa have numerous benefits when it comes to your work, it also offers social opportunities. For young workers, Fórsa Youth also offer the chance to get

involved with campaigns and events. This year, Fórsa youth held quizzes, discussions and a conference. There are also numerous other networks in Fórsa, such as Fórsa Left and the Fórsa LGBTQIA+ Network.

I don't want to be a rep — is there another way I can take part?

Yes, you can attend meetings, join campaigns, contribute ideas, march with your union at demos or simply vote in ballots. Every action makes a difference.

STUDENT OUTREACH
Fórsa Youth
Secretary
Rachel Fennelly



International

Commission President's tilt towards deregulation slammed by unions

Hannah Deasy

CSQ Editor

European trade unions reacted with dismay to proposed deregulation, outlined in EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's recent State of the Union speech.

Every September, since 2010, the President of the European Commission has given a 'State of the European Union' speech (SOTEU). Delivered to the European Parliament, it provides an opportunity for the President to outline their ambitions, priorities and political vision for the year ahead. This year, Ursula von der Leyen addressed MEPs on Wednesday 10th September.

The speech was characterised as 'combative' with von der Leyen arguing that Europe is in a fight for its future. While statements on external security, defence and geopolitics dominated coverage of the speech, European trade unions responded with concern to an announcement that the Commission will propose a Quality Jobs Act and 'omnibus' packages to simplify rules and regulations.

Following the speech, the European Public Services Union (EPSU) expressed alarm that the omnibus packages would weaken existing obligations on corporations to protect workers' health and safety, as well as the environment, and accused the Commission of using its "unprecedented simplification effort" as a smokescreen for deregulation.

In advance of the speech the EPSU had coordinated a statement signed by more than 470 trade unions, civil society groups, and environmental organisations from all across Europe, including Fórsa.

EPSU General Secretary, Jan Willem Goudriaan, said: "The omnibus proposals are a threat to workers' rights and health and safety. They roll back protections for our environment and our communities. They advance the interests of



SOCIAL RIGHTS A coalition of groups marched from Maastricht to Brussels over three days in September to highlight the dangerous push for deregulation by the EU Commission

Picture: EPSU

corporations, not workers and people."

He continued: "At the same time, public services and regulators are underfunded and lack resources. Without rules and enforcement, corporations will steal from workers, harm our environment, and violate our communities."

"We expect the Commission to promote the interests of all, not the few. The omnibuses undermine the rules that make our societies better. They put lives and communities at risk. They should be withdrawn."

Reacting to the announcement of the Quality Jobs Act the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) outlined a number of key tests the legislation must pass to receive trade union support – from increasing collective bargaining coverage to limits on subcontracting, and the development of a Just Transition Directive, as well as protections for workers faced with AI and

psychosocial stress at work.

ETUC general secretary Esther Lynch said: "One of the best ways to lift families out of poverty is to ensure they can earn a decent wage. That means ensuring they benefit from a collectively bargained contract."

"Quality jobs are incompatible with the rise of exploitative zero-hours contracts which should be banned. Instead, we need to ensure that every worker's existing right to collective bargaining is enforced by excluding organisations which refuse to play by the rules from public procurement."

She welcomed the acknowledgement by President von der Leyen that the speed of change in our economy is affecting people's lives and careers, calling for increased protections through new EU Directives: "The logical consequence is to include a Just Transition Directive which gives workers the right to training during working hours, and a

directive which ensures that the use of AI benefits workers rather than violates their rights."

To keep raising awareness about the 'deregulation drive' the EPSU joined a march from Maastricht to Brussels which took place between 21st and 23rd September.

The 'Back to the Future' march retraced the historic route from Maastricht, where the 1992 Treaty gave the EU a stronger social and environmental mandate, to the heart of EU decision-making in Brussels.

Organised by a coalition of trade unions, NGOs and civil society groups, the message was: protect workers, protect people, protect the planet.

Addressing the crowds EPSU President Françoise Geng said: "For us this mobilisation is a major initiative. It carries fundamental demands: that legislators put social rights and environmental protection back at the top of Europe's priorities."

The EPSU will now begin building a Europe-wide campaign to protect public services and fight back against deregulation with strategy meetings due to begin shortly.

One of the best ways to lift families out of poverty is to ensure they can earn a decent wage. That means ensuring they benefit from a collectively bargained contract



Fórsa funding for inner city initiatives

Picture: William Murphy, Infomatique (CC BY -SA 2.0)

Hannah Deasy

CSQ Editor

Many members know Fórsa's head office well, whether from coming to meetings, collecting flags, or simply from seeing the address on correspondence. Located at Nerney's Court, the union's headquarters is in the heart of Dublin's North East Inner City (NEIC).

The NEIC is an area of just over six square kilometres, bounded to the south by the River Liffey, and to the east by the sea, to the north by the River Tolka and Clonliffe Road, and to the west by Dorset Street and East Arran Street.

For some time now Fórsa has run a small grants fund which aims to support community initiatives based in the NEIC.

Outlining the reasons why the fund was established deputy general secretary Matt Staunton said: "The North East Inner City is steeped in history and home to many landmarks and cultural institutions, but in recent years it has gained national media attention for all the wrong reasons, notably during the Dublin riots in November 2023. Such coverage does a disservice to the people who call this place home, and who are building their lives here."

He continued: "We set up this fund because Fórsa is proud to be based in this historical, culturally-rich and vibrant part of Dublin. Our small grants fund aims to support community organisations and initiatives that work on fostering education, intercultural development and social inclusion."

This year organisations working with marginalised communities were invited to apply in May, and all awardees have now been notified. More than 30 initiatives will benefit from funding of up to €500.

Fórsa's senior vice president, and chair of the Dublin City Council branch, Julie Flood said: "The applications we received blew us away. There are so many deserving causes and so many people doing fantastic work in this part of our capital city. We were thrilled to be able



STREET LEVEL Lower Sherrard Street in the heart of Dublin's North Inner City, focus of Fórsa's small grants initiative



BACKING EXCELLENCE Kieran O'Neill, Fórsa Senior VP Julie Flood, double European Gold medallist Ava Henry, coach Philip Keogh, and Stephen Dunphy, who is Treasurer of the union's Dublin City Local Government Branch



TALENTED BOXER Fórsa Senior VP Julie Flood, with Kieran O'Neill and European Gold medallist Chloe Gabriel

As a union with members from all across Ireland and around the world, we're proud to support the community we are based in. Solidarity starts at home

to support local initiatives from residents' groups to sports groups, youth services, local health projects, unemployment services and so much more."

She continued: "It was a privilege to meet the tireless community activists who give so much of their own time and

energy to make life better for others. We were delighted to visit Dublin Docklands Boxing Club and meet Ava Henry and Chloe Gabriel, two talented young boxers who train in the club.

"There are high hopes that these two young boxers will go

on to great things. Ava has already won Double Gold at European level, and Chloe is also an European Gold medallist. The club intends to use the grant towards travel costs, which is a great example of how a little help can go a long way."

Julie added: "As a union with members from all across Ireland and around the world, we're proud to support the community we are based in. Solidarity starts at home."

Recruitment

Fórsa team braves mud and gets stuck in at **#Ploughing2025**

They debated bringing the wellies, but like tens of thousands of others, Fórsa staff were glad of them as the fields of Offaly turned to brown sludge this year – a far cry from the beaming rays of Ploughing 2024. **James Redmond** has this report from Screggan

All day long, Fórsa ran into delighted members. Tote bags and t-shirts were handed out to anyone who stopped by, while a never-ending stream of teenagers took part in a competition designed to plant a little knowledge about trade unions before they take on their first job.

The threatened downpours never came, and instead the crowds got a classic September day – bright skies, good spirits, and just the sharp lash of a shower to spice things up.

Fórsa's director of campaigns, Kevin Donoghue, was in the thick of it all week. He told CSQ: "We're talking to members, non-members, potential members and young people about what Fórsa is, what it does and what we have to offer. We have plenty on offer, and people are really engaging with us. The atmosphere is great. People absolutely love the Ploughing, and it's really easy to get caught up in it as well."

Outside the Education and Business Hub, former union president – and now treasurer – Micheal Smyth charmed his way across the arena, dropping into numerous tents and stalls where Fórsa members were staffing tables for their employers.

He said: "The people that are at the Ploughing Championship that we represent are largely people from across the civil and public service. People working in government departments and in semi-states would be represented with stalls here."

But what really struck Michael was the level of recognition Fórsa now commands – not least thanks to the pension parity strike, which has lodged itself firmly in the hearts and minds of the nation.

"The amount of people I've met from the school sector, for example senior school secretaries who were on tours with young people from that sector, has been quite substantial. So, it's a great cross-section of our society that we're meeting here. And it's important that we enforce our presence



ON MESSAGE Fórsa president Martin Walsh



'HUGE ENGAGEMENT'
Khalid El-Busaidy and Rency George staffing the Fórsa stall



where the people are."

By early afternoon, Fórsa's senior membership recruitment officer Khalid El-Busaidy had already clocked more than 10 hours weaving his way through muck and crowds. His day started at 6am, but he was still buzzing.

He said: "It's the crowd coming in who are giving us all the energy and the buzz and the sparkle. Without the mud there's no

Ploughing Championships. It's been brilliant. That is the taste of the ploughing."

And the engagement, Khalid added, was massive: "A lot of people coming in here are public sector workers. There are thousands of them. And as I said, we've had huge engagement with people coming to this tent." Despite the early starts and long days, the energy was infectious. Margaret, a

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PENS & PAMPHLETS DEC chair Jean Taylor (right) hands out Fórsa info at the Revenue stall



'AMAZING' For Áine, from Dungarvan, the Ploughing is a yearly tradition

It's so nice and refreshing as a Fórsa member to know that there's always someone there if you need to talk to someone or get advice



FIRM HANDSHAKE Fórsa treasurer Michael Smyth

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school secretary from Gaelscoil Athy and a native of Ballylunan, stopped by with her daughter, both of them, like tens of thousands across the country, taking a day off for the event.

"It's a nice day out," she smiled. For Margaret, the union's presence at the Ploughing was reassuring after recent battles.

"We were involved in the strike two weeks ago. Obviously, the talks are ongoing, so we're waiting to hear what will happen. I knew you were here again today, so we said we'd pop over and say 'hello'."

The strike was still fresh in Margaret's mind. "I'm glad we done it," she continued, "and I'm

very pleased so far to hear that we're sitting down to talks and hopefully we'll get somewhere. I'm certainly glad we took part in it. We put the effort in. We did the work. So we're not looking for anything different or special or anything."

Áine, a special needs assistant from Dungarvan and a proud farmer's daughter, was in flying form and in her element.

"Fabulous. Absolutely amazing. The cow makes it. Love it," she said, grinning from ear to ear as she took in the Fórsa stall with its 8-foot-high billboard warning punters not to "Get milked at work."

For her, the Ploughing is an annual highlight. "It's like a yearly tradition for me. And I'm a farmer's daughter, so it's great. It's an amazing event for everybody. There's so much here. It's crazy."

And of course, there was the mud. All conversations eventually lead to the mud. "A couple of years ago I was here and I was covered head to toe in mud, and I made the front page of *The Farmers Journal* because of it. So this year, I am doing pretty well," laughed Áine.

But above all, Áine spoke about solidarity: "It's so nice and refreshing as a Fórsa member to know that there's always someone there if you need to talk to someone or get advice. I cannot say enough about how much support we get from ye — it's unbelievable. And everyone should join if they can."

With only the briefest of a September shower, the day was a hit. For Fórsa, the Ploughing was more than an event, it was a reminder that the union's strength is found where members gather, get involved, and get stuck in. Even if that means getting stuck in the mud in the middle of Offaly.

A UNION THAT WINS DEC chair Jean Taylor (centre) with members from Revenue



Watch the full report on YouTube at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyH5zro5_5YI

Solidarity

Union steps up to sponsor Moataz Sarsour GAA team

Fórsa kits out young hurlers in Palestine

Brendan Kinsella

Fórsa Communications

Earlier this year, Fórsa's international solidarity fund sponsored jerseys and kits for the GAA Palestine Moataz Sarsour hurling club. The kits were planned for use during a summer tour, that was ultimately cancelled.

In anticipation of the GAA Palestine summer tour, Fórsa worked with O'Neills Sportswear to provide full sets of kits for the young players of the Moataz Sarsour GAA club, including jerseys, shorts, tracksuits, and helmets. The sponsored kits were due to be presented to the young hurlers on their arrival in Ireland. Unfortunately, the club's visas were rejected on contested grounds, and Fórsa had to make alternative arrangements to ensure the club received their kits. The kits have now arrived and are being proudly sported by the young hurlers during their summer camp in Jordan.

Stephen Redmond of GAA Palestine said: "We're proud to share the new Moataz Sarsour GAA club shirts, marking a special moment for our club and community. The children are absolutely delighted with the new kits, which not only reflect our values and identity but also carry the powerful human rights 'Peace Dove' logo - a symbol of hope and solidarity that has already attracted international media attention." He

continued: "We are sincerely grateful to the Fórsa team for their continued support and the meaningful collaboration that brought this project to life. Their dedication and efforts in working alongside us have made a real impact.

"With this growing international recognition, we're confident that Fórsa's message will now reach a new and wider audience, further strengthening the connection between sport, human rights, and community."

Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan said: "Gaelic games can bring out the best in us. It teaches us solidarity, caring for others in our communities, and striving to be better.

"By sponsoring these jerseys, we are sending a message of solidarity and hope for the future. Even in the darkest of times every person needs hope. It was disappointing that the young hurlers didn't get to visit and experience the warm community that is the grassroots GAA and that we didn't get to present the kits and jerseys to the children in person."

● Following the last-minute refusal of visas and the need to rearrange the summer tour into a summer camp in Jordan, it was estimated GAA Palestine lost €38,000. To help GAA Palestine recoup the loss and continue providing a safe haven for young Palestinians you can donate at <https://gaapalestine.com/donate>

Gaelic games can bring out the best in us. It teaches us solidarity, caring for others in our communities, and striving to be better. By sponsoring these jerseys, we are sending a message of solidarity and hope for the future. Even in the darkest of times every person needs hope



Leaving work doesn't mean leaving your union

Are you planning for your retirement? Did you know that you can be a retired member of Fórsa?

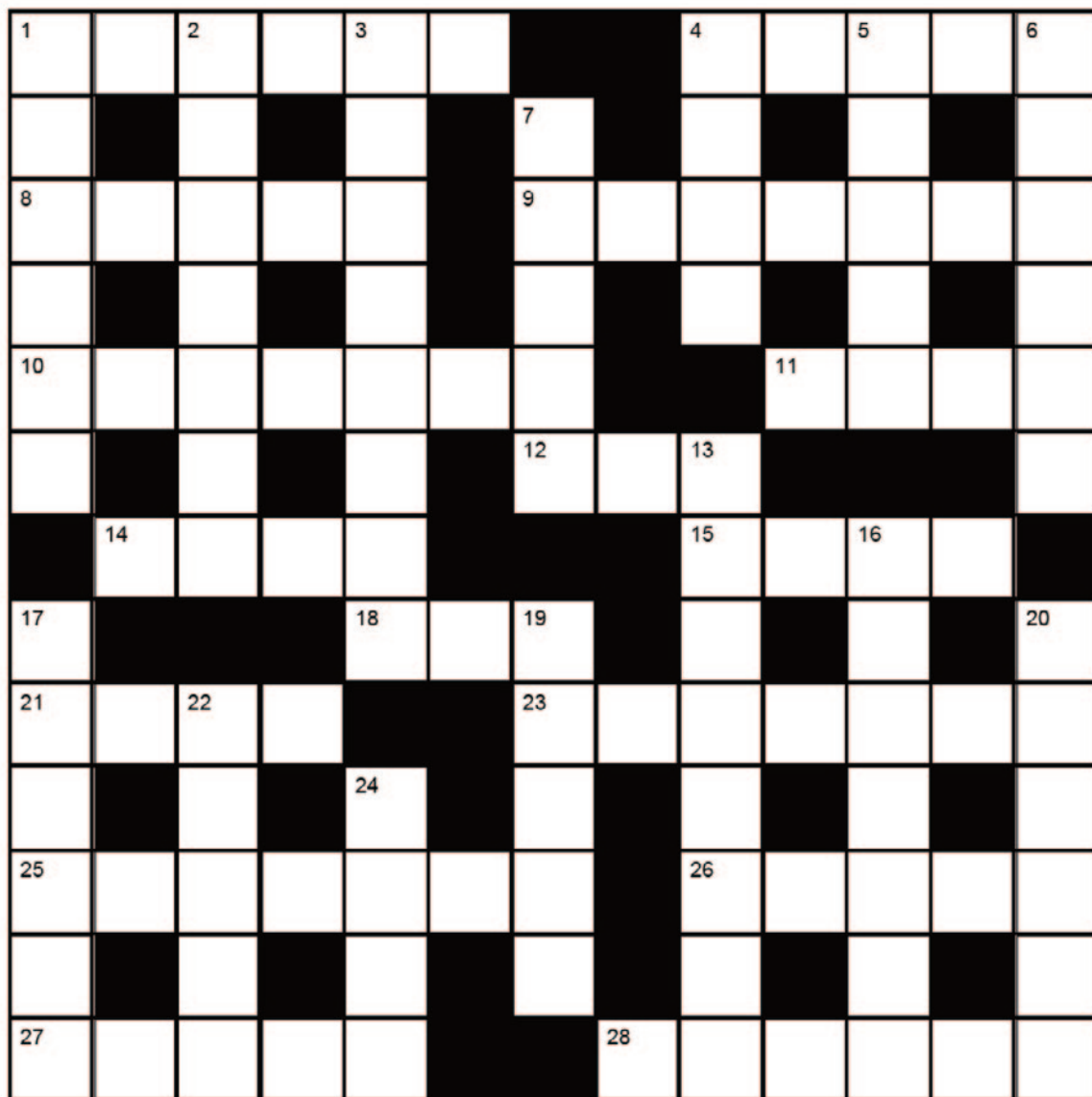
By remaining in membership, you'll continue to be a part of the largest public services union in Ireland and you'll have access to lots of our member-only benefits, including:

- **Exclusive member benefits:** Discounts and money off offers.
- **Networking opportunities:** Stay connected with your peers.
- **Lifelong learning:** Access to seminars and events to stay informed and inspired.
- **A voice that matters:** Help shape Fórsa initiatives by sharing your unique perspective.

Click **HERE** for free membership until January 2026

Crossword

Crossword set by Peter Connaughton



Across

1. The number of faces on a Dodecahedron (6)
4. The Greek god of the underworld (5)
8. Yorkshire's Garden Racecourse (5)
9. Floating mass of frozen water (7)
10. Flowering plant also known as Deora Dé (7)
11. Ciara Mary-Alice Thompson (4)
12. Horror movie franchise that began in 2004 (3)
14. Thomas Patrick, Irish revolutionary and politician - 1885-1917 (4)
15. Killer whale (4)
18. It could be Black, White, Yellow or Red (3)
21. The left side on a ship (4)
23. The Latin name for Wales (7)
25. L (7)
26. In Irish mythology, a renowned warrior, poet, and storyteller (5)
27. Jack won seven All-Irelands for Kerry (5)
28. Manager of 27 across (6)

Down

1. A tax or duty paid on a particular class of imports or exports. (6)
2. "England that every man will do his duty" - Nelson (7)
3. The Lady Hitchcock movie (8)
4. Nephew of Donald Duck (4)
5. A series of thoughts, images, or emotions occurring during sleep (5)
6. Tourist attractions (6)
7. And 20 down - George Eliot novel (5)
13. The primary ingredient in the alcoholic beverage absinthe (8)
16. A woman's or girl's formal greeting made by bending the knees with one foot in front of the other. (7)
17. The Ancient Greek God of the Sun (6)
19. Ghanaian capital (5)
20. See 7 down (6)
22. Coarse fish - *Rutilus rutilus* (5)
24. South American civilisation (4)

CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS CSQ Spring 2025

ACROSS: 7. Panama; 8. Talbot; 9. Biko; 10. Di Caprio; 11. Educational; 14. Carrigstown; 18. Cagliari; 19. Moby; 20. Bogied; 21. Estate.
DOWN: 1. Matilda; 2. Faro; 3. Bardot; 4. Stucco; 5. Elephant; 6. TOWIE; 12. Chaplain; 13. Two Bits; 15. Rwanda; 16. Geiger; 17. Canon; 19. Matt.