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**In this issue**

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Fórsa's first year  
President Ann McGee  
Gender equality: getting the  
balance right in Fórsa  
2019 goals: expanding sectors  
and career progression  
The other faces of education  
Women's Equality Network  
The Future of Work: a four-day week  
'Always on' work culture, and other  
things that can kill you  
Cultural activist and icon Tonie Walsh

Plus all the latest union news with  
food, music, culture, travel and  
competitions.



# FÓRSA



**Leading  
from the  
front**

**Fórsa: One year on**

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# FÓRSA

Winter-Spring 2019

## Leading from the front

### Fórsa: One year on

Fórsa is produced by Fórsa trade union's Communications Unit and is edited by Niall Shanahan. Deputy editor Roisin McKane.

Front cover: L-R: Anita O'Reilly, Angela Kirk, Ann McGee, Florence Hickey and Fiona Fallon attending the Women's Equality Network on 3rd November this year. Photo: Conor Healy, [pictureitphotography.ie](http://pictureitphotography.ie)

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Printed by Boylan Print Group.

Advertising sales:  
Niki O'Brien.  
Phone: 01-864-1920.

Unless otherwise stated, the views contained in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the policy of Fórsa trade union.

This magazine is printed on environmentally friendly paper, certified by the European Eco Label. This magazine is 100% recyclable.



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# FÓRSA

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# One year on and looking good Fórsa

AS WE mark the first year of Fórsa in this edition, and look forward to a full and challenging year ahead in 2019, I am keen to express my personal gratitude to all of the people who've worked so hard to make this past year a success.

In particular, I wish to express my appreciation to the former officers from the three forerunner organisations; Margaret Coughlan, Patricia Fanning, Michael Barry, Kevin O'Malley, Alan Hanlon, Paddy Quinn, Paul O'Halloran, Terry Kelleher, Alan Duffy and Mark Wynne. Also, my renewed thanks to Pat Fallon and Niall McGuirk, with whom I served as joint president in the first half of 2018.

Thanks also to our chief negotiators in the amalgamation process, former presidents Jerry King and Tony Conlon.

I've received a warm welcome from union branches as AGM season gets underway. It's been a pleasure to meet the Aer Lingus Cabin Crew, SENOs, Ag No 1 and Longford Clerical branches so far.

I was delighted to be invited to the launch of the Sligo/Leitrim trades council recently. It was a very successful evening, well supported by all unions across the counties, and chaired by our own Richy Carrothers. Speakers included Fórsa deputy general secretary Kevin Callinan and an inspirational speech from youth activist Irene Tiernan.

At the last meeting of Fórsa's national executive in December, it was great to get a briefing from lead organisers Joe, Oragh, and Julie on campaigning, strategic development and training and all the work being carried out by our organising team.

I've also enjoyed being involved with the great work by our branch campaign officers, and I wish to acknowledge the work of our communications team, keeping us all informed of union issues.

I'd like to thank my fellow officers - Maura, Kevin, Michael and Eugene - for their hard work, and to express our thanks to all Fórsa staff for their hard work during 2018.

As the New Year gets underway, let's remember the colleagues, friends and family we lost during this past year.

My thanks to all the Fórsa activists for their diligent hard work, and the time they give so freely to the union, and my thanks too to Fórsa members for their continued support.

I'm looking forward to the union's continuing success in 2019, let's continue to achieve that together.



**Ann McGee, Fórsa President**

**January 2019**

**Climate change**



3

**One year On**



8

**Gender equality**



12

**Career progression**



14

**Culture vulture**



38

**FÓRSA: ONE YEAR ON**

**UNION NEWS** .....4  
Snapshots from the news desk

**A PRESIDENT'S VIEW**.....8  
We talk to union president ANN McGEE

**A GOOD START** .....11  
Perspectives from general secretaries SHAY CODY and EOIN RONAYNE

**PICTURING GENDER** .....12  
A special infographic on Fórsa's gender composition

**CAREER PROGRESSION** .....14  
The year ahead in Health and Welfare, we talk to ÉAMONN DONNELLY

**THE LONG GAME**.....16  
We talk to PETER NOLAN about this year's challenges in Local Authorities

**EXPANDING SECTORS** .....18  
Services and Enterprises head ANGELA KIRK on a tumultuous year

**CIVIL SERVICE** .....20  
DEREK MULLEN reflects on the first Fórsa year in Civil Service

**OTHER FACES** .....22  
Fórsa's Education division grows stronger, we spoke to KEVIN CALLINAN

**IN PICTURES: EQUALITY NETWORKS** .....24  
The first network, Women's Equality, launched in November 2018

**IN PICTURES: THE FUTURE OF WORK**.....26  
CONOR HEALY captures the images from our special working time event

**FOUR DAY WEEK**.....28  
It's time to talk about why we need to change working time

**WORK IS A FOUR LETTER WORD** .....32  
Always on? That stuff'll kill you says AINGEALA FLANNERY

**EAT WELL**.....34  
DANIEL DEVERY suggests you ignore the glut of New Year diet advice

**TRAVEL PLANS** .....36  
Looking for somewhere different? UNA-MINH KAVANAGH is on the case

**CULTURE VULTURE** .....38  
Tonie Walsh, an icon of cultural activism and social change

**BOHEMIAN ROCKETMAN** .....40  
RAYMOND CONNOLLY on the gods of rock coming to a cinema near you

**WIN WIN WIN**.....43  
Crossword, competitions and prize survey



Niall Shanahan.

Fórsa is officially one year old. In this edition we reflect on the year that's passed, but more importantly we look ahead to the future.

# Look ahead

A YEAR ago we were putting the finishing touches to launching the new union. One year on, it's appropriate to reflect back on what we've achieved so far. The examples that stand out are disputes like those we encountered in Roscommon and IALPA's dispute with Ryanair.

There was also the breakthrough on new entrants. The newly agreed measures identify two points on each pay scale - year four and year eight - which new entrant public servants will now skip.

Looking ahead, our School Secretaries branch are gearing up now for their pay equality campaign, and have been winning support for their efforts in recent months.

Our Special Needs Assistants branches have also been responding to the NCSE proposals published last year, and we're also gearing up for a busy conference

season in the Spring.

Elsewhere, the union has been focusing on the future of Irish Water. Last year the government invited unions to engage in a WRC-assisted process aimed at creating a framework for the proposed transfer to a single water utility by 2021.

This would be four years before the expiry of existing service level agreements (SLAs) between Irish Water and local councils, and a referendum to underpin public ownership and control of the utility is high on the union agenda.

2019 may go down in history as the year of Brexit (or will it?). It seems likely to dominate this year's national conversation yet again, regardless of what happens at 11pm on Friday 29th March.

Looking much further into the future, we

bring you reports and perspective on the future of the working week. This was the focus of a major international conference hosted by Fórsa toward the end of 2018, winning substantial media coverage (and a surprising level of support and engagement from media and employer groups) on the future potential of a four-day week.

Elsewhere we bring you a selection of culture, food and opinion items with a forward looking perspective. In this edition our *Culture Vulture* column takes a look at the latest show from theatre innovators thisispopbaby. *I Am Tonie Walsh* is set to tour the country this year. It's a story of activism, both personal and universal, setting its sights on the need to keep fighting: for housing, for human rights and for a sustainable future.

Let's get on with it ■



# Public sector pay improves

CIVIL AND public servants receive their latest union-negotiated pay and pension levy boosts from 1st January.

Under the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), pay will go up by 1% for those earning €30,000 a year or less. The pension levy threshold will also rise to €32,000, bringing a net improvement of €325 a year for most.

There's a further boost for those who joined the public service after January 2013 – and who are in the single public service pension scheme. They will now pay only two-thirds of the pension levy rate – a figure that will fall to one-third

next year.

The PSSA, which was negotiated by Fórsa and other unions in 2017, will also deliver another 1.75% salary adjustment for all in September. Further pay boosts and another adjustment in the pension levy threshold are due next year.

The PSSA was accepted in ballots of the members of the three unions that amalgamated to create Fórsa last year. It will also see an end to the pension levy on any non-pensionable elements of public service incomes from January 2019.

Earlier last year, the union also insisted on early measures to address the 'new entrants' pay issue even though, under the agreement, this was not bound to be dealt with until 2020 at the earliest.

Fórsa has also called on the Public Service Pay Commission to start its work on recruitment and retention issues in the civil service and the health and social care professions, which is also covered by the agreement.

Non-pay provisions in the PSSA include strong protections against outsourcing.

# Unions target pay adjustments in 2019

ICTU'S PRIVATE sector committee has set a target of 3.4% for private sector pay settlements in 2019. The committee also said it wants to secure additional benefits and continue to address 'legacy issues' in private sector employments.

The 3.4% target is up from a 3.1% ambition it set for 2018. Unions say the target takes account of expected inflation in regard to personal consumption, as well as increases in the cost of housing and other necessities.

Additional benefits such as improved annual leave, bonus payments, pensions and vouchers, have also been an increasingly common feature of agreements in recent years.

Head of Fórsa's Services and Enterprises Division Angela Kirk, who is a member of the ICTU committee, said the union had reached a number of agreements in the private sector and commercial semi-state bodies last year. These include a 3% basic salary increase in Dublin Airport Authority in a three-year agreement for the period up to 2019.

Angela added that Aer Lingus non-pilot grades agreed an 8.5% deal, to be paid over 39 months from April 2017, with scope for further increases linked to productivity.



# Career progression top priority for 2019

CAREER PROGRESSION for health service staff will be the top priority for Fórsa's Health and Welfare Division in 2019, according to its national secretary Éamonn Donnelly.

In an interview for this edition of *Fórsa* magazine (see page 14), he said this would entail protecting and extending the recently-won job evaluation scheme, while agreeing additional career progression paths for health and social care professionals.

The division's elected executive also agreed to prioritise winning a staff transfer policy, with regional clerical and admin panels, when it met in December to iron out its priorities for 2019.

Meanwhile, the union will continue to push for the Public Service Pay Commission to start work on recruitment and retention issues for health and social care professional grades.

Éamonn also wants a more coordinated approach to hospital groups within the union, whose branch and regional



Éamonn Donnelly.

structure is not aligned to new HSE hospital structures. And he said the executive wants to "take ownership" of strategy to increase union membership in Fórsa grades.

Above all, Éamonn said he was determined that the union would be leading debates about health service policy and development in hospitals, primary and community care, and prevention and health promotion.

"The public and political debate hardly ever moves beyond waiting lists and trolleys. Those issues are real, but they are symptoms of a much wider set of

concerns and problems about capacity and investment right across the service, including in prevention and health promotion as well as primary and community services. Fórsa needs to be at the forefront of that debate," he said.

Read the full interview on page 14.

## Limerick Soviet centenary publication: submissions sought

THE LIMERICK Writer' Centre propose to publish an anthology of writings and artistic material in conjunction with the Limerick Soviet 100 Committee's special celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the Limerick Soviet.

Fórsa members are invited to submit material for the publication, illustrating on their thoughts on the 1919 Soviet and/or its legacy for Ireland in 2019.

The Limerick Soviet was a self-declared soviet that existed from 15th to 27th April 1919.

A general strike was organised by the Limerick Trades and Labour Council, as a protest against the British Army's declaration of a "Special Military Area" under the Defence of the Realm Act, which covered most of Limerick city and a part of the county. The soviet ran the city for the period, printed its own money and organised the supply of food.

The event made world, as well as national headlines, at the time, and is still seen, internationally, as a major occurrence in labour history.

Local and national figures will be invited to contribute to the publication. It will be edited by Dominic Taylor and John Liddy and published by The Limerick Writers' Centre in 2019, the centenary year.

Submissions should be made to the Limerick Writer Centre, 12 Barrington Street, Limerick, Ireland (limerickwriterscentre@gmail.com) by 28th February 2019.

*Centenary - An anthology celebrating the Limerick Soviet 1919* is due to be published no later than October 2019.

## Congress welcomes disability threshold rise



The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) has welcomed a significant increase in the amount of money people with disabilities can earn before they lose their medical card.

The Government recently announced that the so-called 'income disregard' would rise from €6,000 a year to €22,000. ICTU called this a "significant development in removing barriers to employment for people with disabilities."

Unions believe the change, which is in line with a recommendation in the 2017 inter-departmental report 'Make Work Pay', will remove the fear of losing a medical card for many people with disabilities who want to work.

People with disabilities are currently only half as likely to be in employment as other people of working age.

# Oireachtas Ushers raise funds for Brother Kevin

FÓRSA'S OIREACHTAS Ushers branch has raised more than €3,300 in aid of Brother Kevin of the Capuchin Day Centre for Homeless People in Bow Street in Dublin.

The money was raised when the branch hosted a race night event to mark its annual Christmas function in December. The branch represents just over 60 ushers working in the houses of the Oireachtas.

Branch chairperson Gerry Wilson explained "The branch committee decided this year to organise a charity component to coincide with our night out in Kennedy's pub on Westland Row.

"Brother Kevin is a great man and requires no introduction. He was actually there in person to receive the donation from our branch. I must say that during his speech, you could hear a pin drop," he said.

The Capuchin Day Centre welcomes people in need of food aid who have no home or are socially excluded and



Brother Kevin, Capuchin Day Centre, was in attendance at the Oireachtas Ushers branch event to receive their donation.

provides food, family facilities, clothing, showers and advocacy for people experiencing homelessness.

The centre provides around 700 hot meals a day, and 1,700 food parcels a week.

## Kilkenny GDPR training



Kilkenny Health & Local Government Branch held a GDPR training event last November. The training was delivered by Gordon Kelly of BH Consulting and covered, in practical terms, how the legislation will affect branches.

Representatives from Fórsa's Carlow, Wexford, Kerry, Waterford, South Tipperary and Kilkenny branches attended, along with assistant general secretary Shay Clinton.

## Deirdre Glynn retires from Fórsa's Galway office



Deirdre Glynn (centre) celebrates her retirement from Fórsa with her husband Mixie (right) and Fórsa assistant general secretary Pdraig Mulligan.

DEIRDRE GLYNN has retired from Fórsa's Galway office after 18 years of service. Deirdre worked as a cleaner at the office, and was a familiar and friendly face to visitors at the Galway office throughout her time there.

The Galway branch of Fórsa had a dinner in Deirdre's honour and presented her with a gift on her retirement. All the staff and branch members in Galway wish Deirdre and her husband, Mixie (both pictured) a happy and healthy retirement and best wishes for the future.

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Niall Shanahan.

ANN McGEE was elected president of Fórsa at the union's inaugural conference in May 2018. As Fórsa president, Ann is conscious that she is a new face at the top table of the union, and has a strong belief in applying new ideas and strategies to put members first. To begin with, she's taken to the road in her first year to meet as many members as possible.

# It's all about the members

ANN McGEE IS a clerical officer and works in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in the Sligo Pensions Office. She lives in Dromahair in County Leitrim, and family life is busy with her husband David and two teenagers.

Ann was a CPSU branch activist for several years, working daily with members on a range of issues. Before the amalgamation that created Fórsa, Ann was president of the CPSU, and one of the union's three joint presidents in its early months.

Ann firmly believes all our voices are needed to address the persistent inequalities in our society, and is very supportive of members and union representatives that have shown leadership in the area of women's rights, disability and, as she describes it, "fighting for equality for all."

*"From the start the union was a force to be reckoned with because of the size and reach of our membership."*

Since becoming president, Ann has played a very active and visible role in the union, and continues to emphasise her focus on the voice of Fórsa's members.

## Achievements

"We've achieved a lot, we need to stay focused, and continue working together to carve out a shared future for all the members of the union.

"The amalgamation itself, the creation of Fórsa last year, was a very significant achievement. From the start the union was a force to be reckoned with because of the size and reach of our membership.



Fórsa president, Ann McGee.

"Many people would have asked themselves, in the earliest days, where will Fórsa make its mark? We asked that of ourselves, and the disputes in Roscommon and at Ryanair answered that question, and showed us how much could be achieved, while a successful outcome on new entrants pay, two years

earlier than planned, was also a welcome example of what we can achieve," says Ann.

Ann mentions the wide range of issues where she feels positive about what the union can achieve, including the future of Irish Water, school completion programmes and the union's equality networks. "We're also leading the way on the debate about the four-day working week (see page 31) and it was great to see such a strong Fórsa attendance at last October's 'Raise the Roof' rally."

*"It's not about me, it's about the members, and that's where I like to keep my focus, that's what drives me."*

Ann says the next big challenge will be the next round of talks for a national pay agreement, following the expiration of the PSSA next year. "We will be entering those talks as a much larger, more unified union. I think members will be interested to see how that works out, as well as people outside the organisation."

Ann made a commitment early in her presidency that she wanted to get out and meet as many members of the union as possible, and has followed through on that commitment, meeting branches up and down the country to find out more about what union members are thinking about.

"Most members I meet are keen to see a change in what a larger union can do. While members in the Civil Service and Services and Enterprises divisions have



Ann McGee taking part in a march earlier this year in support of Roscommon workers.

seen quite a bit of organisational change, others are hoping to see what can be achieved."

## Impressions

While Ann has been struck by the level of hard work and commitment by member activists up and down the country, the union's School Secretaries and four SNA branches have left a very particular impression. "These are predominantly female branches, with members in low paid work.

"The school secretaries have been a long time trying to break boundaries and I'm delighted to see them launch their campaign for pay equity this year. The SNA branches have also been very active in talking to members about last year's review by the NCSE and its recommendations.

"These are branches that have been very proactive in reaching out across the union for support, and I'm delighted to work with them to achieve that," she says.

## Roscommon

Ann addressed the rally to support workers at Roscommon County Council last June and accused the council of wasting resources in a "needless and

'bloody-minded' crusade against flexibility in the delivery of public services.

Ann said flexibility over working time worked in the interests of local government services and service-users, just as it does for the staff who provide them.

The dispute had provoked the first ever Fórsa strike. In her address Ann said: "This is a bit of labour history that nobody wanted to make. We are public servants who care deeply about the services we provide in our local communities, and none of us contemplate strike action lightly. But equally, we have a responsibility to stand up against injustice - and to protect and defend workers' rights, which have been hard-won by previous generations," she said.

She describes the rally as a significant highlight of 2018.

"When you see an attack like that on family-friendly workplace initiatives, you're aware that if it can be allowed to happen in Roscommon today, it could happen anywhere else tomorrow. Our members understood that, and responded to that, and the solidarity shown at the rally was huge, strong and very encouraging," she says.

## Ryanair

Ann was on the picket line with Ryanair pilots on four out of the five days of strike action taken by pilots last July and August.

"It was important for the pilots to know they had a link to the wider union through my contact with them, and it was very helpful for me to spend time with them on the picket line and to meet and talk to a group of union members that work in a very different environment.

"As a result of the dispute we saw the Fórsa name established throughout Europe and other parts of the world. What's interesting now is meeting people from other organisations who know who we are because of the dispute, who are interested in how it all happened.

"Many of those conversations are about how it took almost 30 years to get into that particular space, and that it wasn't an overnight success. Crucially, we also signed agreements with Ryanair and their agencies to represent cabin crew, giving Fórsa exclusive rights to represent these workers, which was a huge achievement."

*continued on page 10.*



Fórsa President Ann McGee addresses the crowd at a rally in support of Roscommon County Council workers.

## On the road

Ann describes the average working week as president: "Hectic! I pack a car on a Monday and I possibly don't get home again until Saturday."

Ann and I talk about how, for almost every member in the union, the gold standard of communication is the face-to-face contact they have with their local reps. Ann recognises this and wants her presidency, as much as possible, to compliment that relationship with members.

*"We're also leading the way on the debate about the four-day working week and it was great to see such a strong Fórsa attendance at last October's 'Raise the Roof' rally."*

"Because I had previously been the CPSU president, there was a huge section of the membership I hadn't met, and I felt strongly that it was important

to be visible to those members, and also that I'm contactable and approachable. I've spent time with each of the divisional executives too, in order to get a better feel for the issues they're dealing with."

Ann has also taken up invitations to as many branch AGMs as possible, making for a very busy start to 2019 as AGM season is in full swing. She's keen to meet lots of Civil Service branches in order to see how things are going for people as we mark a year of Fórsa's existence.

"The process of change is still happening for some branches of the union, and I'm keen to hear what that experience has been like for people. I want to be able to answer their questions and to reaffirm that we're all working toward building a bigger, stronger union for all members. Our strength lies not just in recruiting new people, but also in retaining our existing members."

## Reaching out

Concerned about a possible 'disconnect' with younger people, Ann is very keen to explore initiatives to boost trade union awareness and civil society engagement among teenagers.

"I'd like to ensure they're better aware of what union membership can offer when they enter the workplace, as well as aware of how much power they have as citizens with a vote. I'd like to see what we could do to boost that in secondary schools, especially in rural Ireland."

*"Ann is very supportive of members and union representatives that have shown leadership in the area of women's rights and disabilities."*

Ann takes the opportunity in our chat to acknowledge the hard work of Fórsa staff across the country. "They do a lot of hard work on behalf of the members, particularly in this inaugural year."

Ann has thoroughly enjoyed her role as president so far, and is looking forward to the challenges that will present themselves in 2019. "It's not about me, it's about the members, and that's where I like to keep my focus, that's what drives me."

Shay Cody, senior general secretary, and Eoin Ronayne, general secretary, share their perspectives on Fórsa's first year.

# 5,000 new members: Tús maith, leath na hoibre



Shay Cody.

FÓRSA, WITH over 80,000 members, is already a significant force in industrial relations and in wider public debate.

On the industrial relations front, we secured significant improvements for our new entrant members, taking two increments from their scales, two years earlier than originally envisaged.

The long and hard work of our pilot members in Ryanair came to fruition when a negotiation of equals was created after a series of strikes and a settlement was secured.

Cabin crew, both in Ryanair and its agency satellites, have secured recognition agreements and we are now focusing on an organising campaign.

There was widespread support across the new union for our members in Roscommon County Council in their struggle against an employer who rejoices in limiting availability of flexitime.

Our members in higher education secured a long promised job evaluation scheme.

*"In 2018, over 5,000 new members joined Fórsa."*

We are at the forefront of public debate on all the issues that shape our society and influence the terms and conditions of our members and the living standards of their families.

That involves securing and holding a place for us as a serious contributor in all national dialogue. All the delegates at our initial biennial conference would have seen the esteem held for our new union by our President, Michael D Higgins.

Similarly, in the House of the Oireachtas, we advocated for the restoration of tax relief on union subscriptions in front of a sizable group of Oireachtas members and their representatives.

Fórsa's working time seminar received widespread publicity as heavyweight platform speakers discussed the future of work.

In 2018, over 5,000 new members joined Fórsa. These members have no historical memory of the three amalgamating unions. Over time, this will become the largest block of our membership. In the meantime, we must continue to strive to retain the best traditions of our forerunners as we build a significant organised force and voice in our workplaces and in our wider society.

Shay Cody, senior general secretary ■

WE KNEW that to build a singular dominant trade union out of three separate unions with strong public identities was going to be a massive challenge.

Securing recognition of Fórsa in the media and in the minds of the public had to be a critical goal from day one. As the year ends we can safely say Fórsa has achieved what the PR gurus term 'brand recognition'.

Fórsa is widely accepted as the voice of public service workers and a key player in the community and private sectors, not least because of the tremendous successes at Ryanair.

Fórsa is viewed as a real force to be reckoned with. This success in the public domain was hard won, not just by our professional communications team but by determined activity in the workplace by our officials, elected representatives and members in general.

Building a single coherent internal organisation out of three different bodies has been, and continues to be, a huge task.

Integrating three separate representative structures and head office teams - while at the same time striving to protect respective cultures and traditions - is challenging. Nevertheless, we have successfully held initial divisional conferences for Service & Enterprises and the Civil Service, bringing together delegates from all three former entities for the first time.

These were followed by the first ever national Fórsa biennial conference which firmly put the union at the centre of national public affairs, and we were indeed honoured by the President of Ireland Michael D Higgins delivering the keynote address.

*"As the year ends we can safely say Fórsa has achieved what the PR gurus term 'brand recognition'."*

Throughout the country branch representatives are coming to terms with working within new structures, policies and procedures. Over the year we have painstakingly drawn together these necessary tools that enable Fórsa to act on behalf of its members.

This has meant differing levels of change for different parts of the union but, over time, the wisdom of creating singular sets of structures, policies, procedures and staff organisation will solidify our union and deliver a platform for greater cohesion.

Tús maith leath na hoibre - a good start is half the work. Our Fórsa organisation is well on its way. The integration project will make further strides in 2019 towards delivering a better union for all.

Eoin Ronayne, general secretary ■



Eoin Ronayne.



Fórsa's 80,000-strong membership is diverse, with members in a wide variety of grades and occupations working throughout the country. Since the formation of the new union it's been vital to understand the composition of the union's branches and divisions in terms of gender.

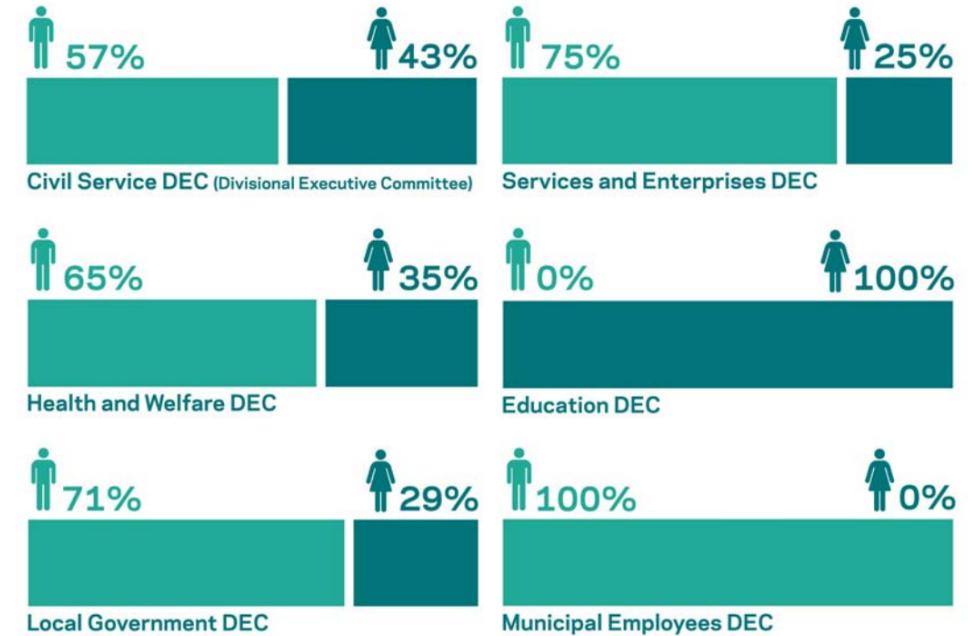
This series of infographics was recently presented to the the union's Consultative Council, made up of representatives from all our branches, and Fórsa's National Executive Committee in order to provide a snapshot of the union's current gender balance. This data will help inform the union's work to improve gender representation throughout the union.

## GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

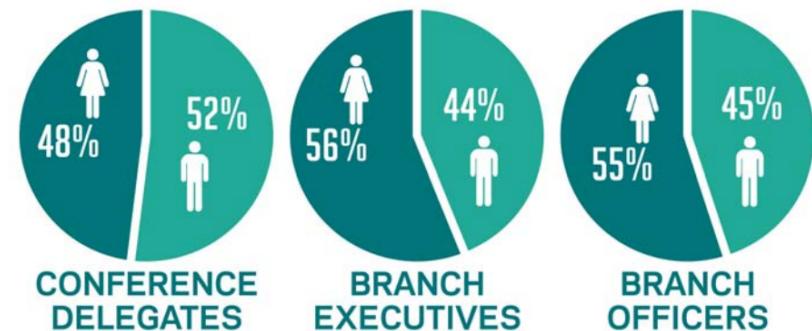


Women make up the majority of Fórsa members across the country

## DIVISIONAL LEVEL: FEMALE INVOLVEMENT IN THE UNION DROPS SIGNIFICANTLY IN 4 OUT OF THE 6 DIVISIONS



## SENIOR POSITIONS ARE PREDOMINATELY MALE WHILE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF ARE OVERWHELMINGLY FEMALE



## BRANCH EXECUTIVE LEVEL





Bernard Harbor.

After a sound year of delivery on its industrial relations priorities, Fórsa's health division is poised to position the union in broader health debates. We spoke to national secretary ÉAMONN DONNELLY.

# Health challenges should hold no fear

THE HEAD of Fórsa's Health and Welfare division, Éamonn Donnelly, was in expansive form when I spoke to him last December.

"I'd say we've delivered more than 75% of the industrial relations priorities we set ourselves in health at the beginning of 2018, and that's aside from the pay recovery underway for all health workers - including the so-called new entrants - under the public service pay agreement," he said.

Donnelly believes the progress he outlines - in community health organisation structures, job evaluation, pay recovery in 'section 39' organisations, and elsewhere - has also worked to position the union as a unique voice in health service debates. And this is something he means to develop in 2019 and beyond.

## Community healthcare

"Take community health structures. This is a huge issue for Fórsa members' pay and conditions as we represent thousands of staff in community and primary care, vital areas that tend to get left behind in largely hospital-focused health debates.

"But it's an even bigger issue for families and communities that need and deserve primary care in their localities. Our health service is too hospital-centric. Investment in primary care close to citizens is a public good in its own right. And it would also free-up badly needed capacity for those who really have to go to hospital, where our members are struggling against the odds to deliver quality services," he says.

That's why the division has framed Fórsa's industrial agenda - which, for

example, includes an increased focus on delivering better career pathways for health and social care professions ("huge for us," says Donnelly) - in the need for better services in community and primary care.

## Job evaluation

A similar thread ran through the union's successful campaign to have job evaluation reactivated for health service clerical and administrative staff just over a year ago. An eight-year suspension of the scheme created a lot of pent-up demand from workers who took on substantial extra responsibilities as staff numbers fell dramatically during the crisis.



Éamonn Donnelly.

"The hard-won reintroduction of job evaluation gives admin staff the hope that their efforts to improve and do more can be recognised. The implementation has been challenging over the past year but, having won the principle, the union has used its influence to get extra resources, which has more than doubled the capacity to do evaluations.

"I'm very conscious of the frustrating waits that many members are experiencing. But we've taken effective steps to speed things up, and over 300 posts have now moved in the past 12 months as a result," says Donnelly.

Éamonn also roots this work in the broader Fórsa campaign to close the gender pay gap. "The union is doing a lot of work on the policy side, including leading the charge on pay gap reporting legislation. But wins like job evaluation are the other side of that coin. Most clerical and admin staff are women, so any mechanism to improve their career path is going to help shift the pay gap," he says.

## Pay

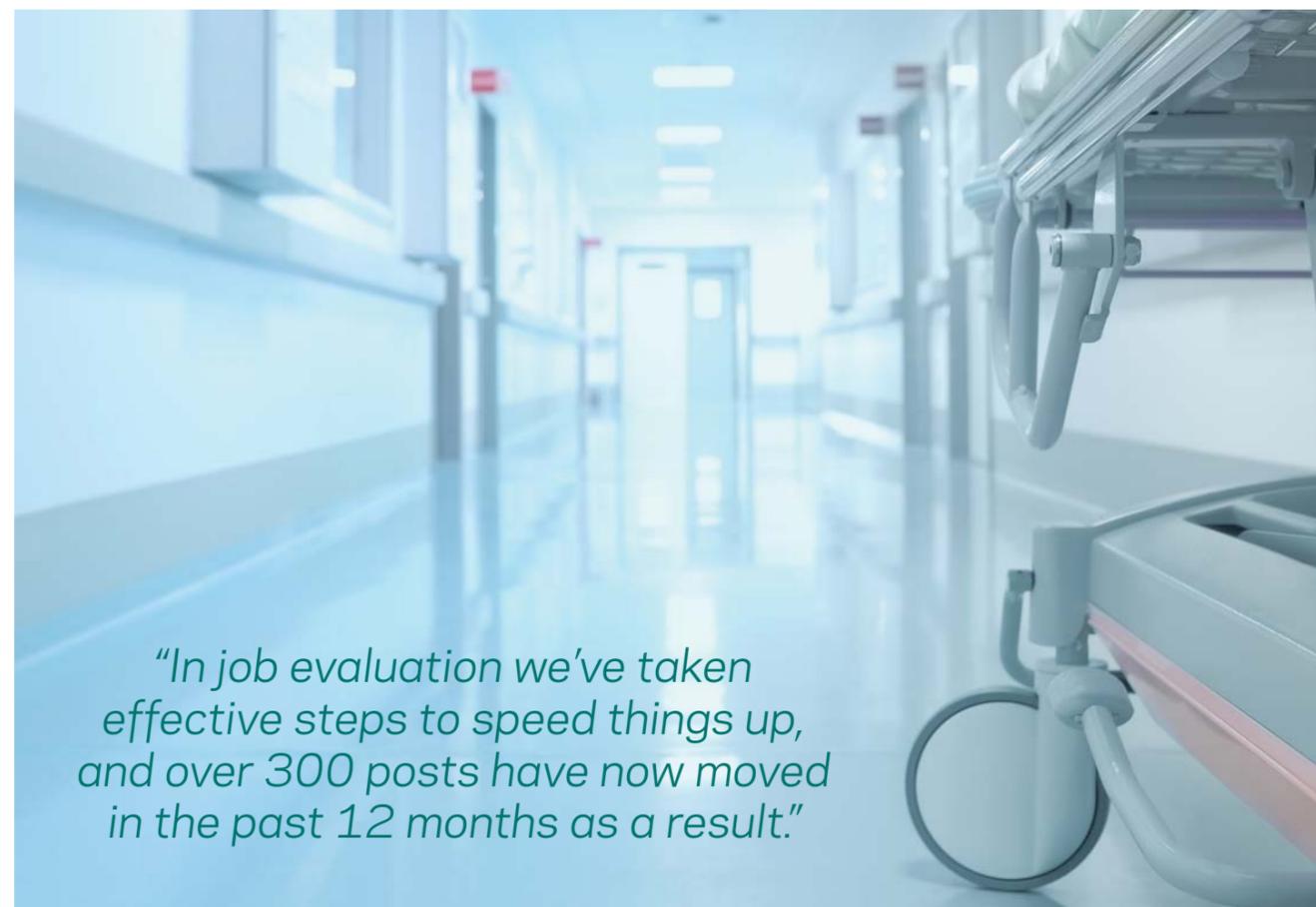
Pay has moved for most health workers over the past year, with the ongoing implementation of the Public Service Stability Agreement. The deal saw a further 1% pay increase for staff earning up to €30,000 in January, as well as a pension levy alteration worth up to €325 a year.

A further 1.75% rise is due for all in September, with additional increases on track for next year.

## Section 39

Fórsa's Health and Welfare division has also spent 2019 working for pay restoration in so-called 'section 39' agencies, which are publically-funded but independent of the state. "We've made progress for workers in some organisations, but there's a way to go yet.

"We're convinced the approach we took represented the best chance of the best



*"In job evaluation we've taken effective steps to speed things up, and over 300 posts have now moved in the past 12 months as a result."*

available outcome. We saw the injustice of staff being denied pay restoration simply because they work outside the mainstream public service. But we also knew that some poorly-funded organisations simply didn't have the money. What's the point of restoring pay if it leads to closed services and job losses," he asks.

Éamonn says the campaign has underlined the need to look afresh at how community and voluntary organisation are funded in the round. "Nobody wants to inhibit independence and innovation in the community and voluntary sector. But we need to get to a situation where organisations that are mainly funded by the state to provide health and community services for the state are treated in the same way as direct state bodies," he says.

## The year ahead

The elected divisional executive met in December to iron out its priorities for 2019. Guarding the job evaluation scheme, and extending it to grade VIIIs is one priority. "The exclusion of grade VIIIs is just discrimination," says Donnelly.

Agreeing additional career progression

paths for health and social care professionals is also in the mix, and Éamonn will continue to push for the Public Service Pay Commission to start work on recruitment and retention issues for these grades.

"Staffing issues in these professions are making it even harder to sustain current community and hospital services, let alone work towards the ambitious service targets set out in Sláintecare. Now that it's published its report on nursing and medical consultants, it's essential that the pay commission moves to the next module and starts work on a deeper study of recruitment and retention problems in other parts of the health service," he says.

The union will also be pursuing a staff transfer policy, with regional clerical and admin panels, and Éamonn wants to press for a more coordinated approach to hospital groups within the union, whose branch and regional structure is not aligned to new hospital structures.

## Growing strength

Éamonn is pleased that the divisional executive has also said it wants to take ownership of the strategy to increase union membership in Fórsa grades.

"It's an exciting challenge. The union's organising efforts have increased exponentially over the last few years, but all of us - officials, elected reps and branches - have a responsibility to get involved. More recruitment means more workers are protected, and it gives us the resources and clout to deliver more for existing members too."

Above all, Éamonn is determined that the union will participate in - and lead - debates about health service policy and developments in hospitals, primary and community care and health promotion.

"The public and political debate hardly ever moves beyond waiting lists and trolleys. Those issues are real, but they are symptoms of a much wider set of concerns and problems about capacity and investment right across the service, including in prevention and health promotion as well as primary and community services," he says.

"Fórsa needs to be at the forefront of that debate, but this comes with a test. If we want to be at the centre of the debate about health service planning and delivery, the union's officials, reps and branches need to see ourselves as leaders as well as industrial relations practitioners. That's a challenge we should take on, rather than fear." ■



Hazel Gavigan.

A dispute in Roscommon marked Fórsa's very first industrial action. While successful, there remains work to do, while the future of Irish Water remains central to the union's agenda. We spoke to head of division PETER NOLAN about the challenges facing our Municipal and Local Government and Local Services divisions as the year ahead takes shape.

## Playing the long game

DURING THE summer of 2018, Fórsa engaged in its very first industrial action, as Roscommon county council workers mounted a number of one-day strikes over management's refusal to halt its effective ban on flexi-leave. "A piece of labour history that nobody wanted to make" remarked the union's president, Ann McGee.

Head of division, Peter Nolan also noted the work underway to secure a job evaluation scheme in the sector, and the current battle to retain the provision of water services in public ownership. These were all big issues in 2018 and will remain to the fore in the year ahead.

### Battle in Roscommon

Fórsa members in Roscommon County Council engaged in four one-day strikes throughout June and July over council management's block on flexible working arrangements, which was in defiance of a Labour Court recommendation.

*"Peter says the union is in good shape to take on the challenges of the year ahead."*

The action affected all council services after at least 12 months had passed since any Roscommon council worker was approved for flexi-leave – arrangements which are in place in every other local authority in Ireland.

In a strong display of trade union solidarity, hundreds of Fórsa members, along with staff from branches all over the country gathered in Roscommon on Saturday the 23rd June and rallied in support their colleagues' efforts.

The rally concluded in the town square where various stakeholders gave

impassioned speeches under the blistering sun about the significance of that day.

"We are public servants who care deeply about the services we provide in our local communities, and none of us contemplate strike action lightly. But equally, we have a responsibility to stand up against injustice – and to protect and defend workers' rights, which have been hard-won by previous generations," Ann McGee declared.



Peter Nolan.

After two further days of strike action, the National Oversight Body stepped in and ruled that in order for Roscommon County Council, as an employer, to prevent itself breaching the terms of the Public Service Stability Agreement (2018-2020), that it re-engage in the pilot scheme process, and develop proposals for full implementation of family-friendly policies through the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC).

The council workers welcomed an agreement that saw flexi-time and flexi-leave made available to them on a two-month trial basis in July. This is

continuing currently with meetings ongoing in the WRC.

Peter says that, unfortunately, another issue has since arisen in the council regarding work sharing. "These workers have faced adversity before and will no doubt overcome this new dispute with the help and efforts of the union. It is expected to go to the WRC for conciliation and we aim to resolve it this year," he said.

### Job evaluation

From Roscommon to Kerry, there were three motions on job evaluations which were adopted at Fórsa's national conference in Killarney. Two of which called for the union to pursue job evaluations across the public sector, and the third called for them to be pursued within all the union's divisions.

The motions reflect the changes brought across the public sector during the moratorium on recruitment during the economic crisis, and how staff have risen to the challenge to maintain and improve services before public service recruitment resumed.

Job evaluation is an established tool that allows the knowledge, skills and responsibilities associated with individual jobs – rather than grades or staff categories – to be assessed and appropriately rewarded. Peter explains that "while a job evaluation doesn't guarantee an upgrading, it enables it to happen if the responsibilities of a job have increased enough."

Speaking in support of the motions at the time Peter said "the union wanted all its members to have the opportunity to have their jobs independently assessed, but said schemes would likely differ in details to suit the sectors and services concerned."



Fórsa members marching in support of their comrades in Roscommon County Council earlier this year

The union has commissioned an independent consultant to produce a business case to bring to the Labour Court. Fórsa is now awaiting advice from the Court on how to proceed so this is sure to be a high point on the agenda for this year.

### Water's future

An issue that will remain central to the union's agenda this year is the future of Irish Water.

Last year, the government announced its to create a single water utility by 2021, four years before the expiry of service level agreements with local authorities.

*"The Government's initiative is fraught with risk and could jeopardise the continuity of safe drinking and waste water supplies."*

Unions have continued to oppose any plans to transfer staff out of local authorities without their agreement. Unions met with local government minister Eoghan Murphy at the end of 2018 and said there's no chance of winning support for his plans to bring 3,500 local authority workers under the control of Irish Water in the absence of

a referendum to underpin public ownership and control of the utility.

Peter said local authority staff have growing fears that a mass movement of council staff to Irish Water control could be a stepping stone to water privatisation unless a referendum takes place first. "The Government's initiative is fraught with risk and could jeopardise the continuity of safe drinking and waste water supplies," he says.

The meeting with the minister gave unions the opportunity to communicate workers' concerns about the status and governance of any new entity, the need for a constitutional referendum to prevent the privatisation of public water services, the need to maintain staffing levels in water services and the need to maintain long term sustainability in local government.

### The year ahead

Peter adds the union continues to focus on protecting and developing members' career prospects. "A positive ballot by members last year secured guarantees for staff with more than 12 months service who might otherwise have been shortlisted out of an interview by online psychometric testing.

"This year will see the union seeking agreement on the creation of a field of competition for grades IV to VII which

will be confined to local authority workers," he says.

Developing opportunities for career progression remains a cornerstone of union policy and Peter says the union is working to achieve a "radical" reform of the Common Recruitment Pool which he says is no longer fit for purpose.

*"In a strong display of trade union solidarity, hundreds of Fórsa members, along with staff from branches all over the country gathered in Roscommon and rallied in support their colleagues' efforts."*

He adds that the union is supporting the push for legislation to allow Dublin fire brigade staff to retire at age 60, and a process to move the ambulance service to Tallaght needs to be resolved.

Peter says the union is in good shape to take on the challenges of the year ahead. "We're anticipating another productive year, we're ready for it, and we're looking forward to laying the groundwork for a wide range of other initiatives at our divisional conference in April." ■



Bernard Harbor.

Fórsa's Services and Enterprises division speaks for workers in the private companies, commercial and non-commercial semi-state organisations, and parts of the community sector. We spoke to national secretary ANGELA KIRK about how 2019 is shaping up.

## Expanding sectors outline new goals

BY THE end of 2018, immediate pay issues had been settled for most Fórsa members in the union's 6,700-strong Services and Enterprises division. But this year its national secretary Angela Kirk expects a lot of action on the organising front.



Angela Kirk.

Staff in non-commercial semi-state organisations are covered by the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA). They received a 1% pay increase in January, as well as a pension levy alteration worth up to €325 a year. A further 1.75% rise is due in September, with additional increases on track for next year.

Meanwhile, the union finalised pay agreements that take most of its members in the private and commercial semi-state sectors into 2020, the same year that the PSSA expires. For the most part, these are broadly in line with PSSA increases, according to Angela, and most come without the productivity conditions common in the sector in the years immediately following the crisis.

### 2020 target

"Although they aren't identical, pay has been moving in a similar direction in the different sectors across the division,

but this is something we'll need to keep an eye on. At the end of last year, unions set a 3.4% target for private sector pay deals in 2019. If this is met, we'll see the beginning of a divergence with the PSSA terms as that agreement approaches its end in 2020," she says.

Angela says the productivity issue had "broken from the trends of recent years" in the private and commercial semi-state sector. "Most awards have steered clear of the productivity terms we saw in the post-crisis period. Where change clauses exist, they are now largely tied to additional pay boosts," she explains.

### Ryanair

One company where pay remains very much on the agenda is Ryanair. Talks on cabin crew pay and working conditions got underway towards the end of 2018 after a tumultuous year in which the union won recognition for pilots and crew - including agency staff - in the formerly anti-union company.



Ryanair pilots picketing outside Dublin Airport.

"Between them, the creation of Fórsa and the fast-moving developments in Ryanair made 2018 a signature year in terms of recruitment and organisation in the division. I'm looking forward to working with branches and the divisional executive to consolidate that in the coming year," says Angela.

Ryanair pilots won recognition at the end of 2017 following the threat of industrial action in a company reeling from pilot shortages that led it to cancel hundreds of flights months earlier. A series of one-day pilot strikes and "many, many hours of talks," which kept the budget airline in the headlines throughout last summer, eventually led to a collective agreement on base transfers, seniority and other matters.

### Recognition

By the end of the year, the union had also won recognition for directly-employed and agency cabin crew in the airline, and a sustained organisation and recruitment effort was put in place.



"The union will also be working on the impact of voluntary redundancies on remaining staff in eir and An Post," says Angela.

"One welcome side-effect of this was the strengthening of the new union's international work and profile. It's fair to say that our IALPA branch led the way in the European-wide Ryanair pilots' campaign. Our efforts on cabin crew also included a substantial international dimension," says Angela.

*"Talks on cabin crew pay and working conditions got underway towards the end of 2018 after a tumultuous year in which the union won recognition for pilots and crew - including agency staff - in the formerly anti-union company."*

The latter included a European Transport Federation (ETF) summit of Ryanair cabin crew, hosted in late summer in Fórsa's Dublin office, which was the prelude to successful recognition campaigns in Ireland and elsewhere.

"On foot of these campaigns, our ambition is to bring hundreds - if not thousands - of aviation workers into the union. But our focus is much wider than that. We are targeting recruitment and organisation across the division," according to the national secretary.

Last November, the executive made a detailed examination of the divisional membership with a view to ensuring that existing structures were working for the range of members and the complexity of issues facing branches representing workers in a huge variety of professions, grades and sectors.

"We've established a sub-group to take this further in 2019 and we've already done a survey of 11 branches as a prelude to more detailed work on mapping membership and recruitment potential across the division. We'll also be looking at communications, training and campaigns," says Angela.

### Pension justice

One continuing campaign is the union's long-running effort to win pensions justice for community employment supervisors, who are currently denied any occupational pension provision despite providing a vital public service. The supervisors recently balloted in favour of industrial action and the union has also pressed the issue through ICTU's community sector committee.

Angela says the union will also be working on the impact of voluntary redundancies on remaining staff in eir and An Post. Both companies saw significant job reductions in 2019, and there are fears over what impact this will have on both staff and organisations they work for.

"Our officials will be engaging with management to get a clear picture of the future in both companies. We're

insisting that staff and customers have certainty and security going forward," says Angela.

### Development

Last year also saw the establishment of a network of branches representing non-commercial semi-state staff, and a meeting of union reps took place in October. "We'll be developing this and it will include regular meetings, perhaps along the lines of 'divisional councils,' which have successfully existed in other divisions over the years," Angela promises.

Staff in the non-commercial sector will also be closely watching civil service discussions on the movement of staff between government departments and semi-state agencies.

This is among a range of issues that impact on workers in both sectors. Another is the much-criticised 'PeoplePoint' HR system, which has caused great frustration to those who use and provide the service.

"The Road Safety Authority branch brought a motion on this issue to our very successful divisional conference in Galway last year, and it has also been the focus of much discussion in the union's Civil Service division," according to Angela.

This year's Services and Enterprises division conference takes place in Sligo in May. Clearly there's going to be a lot to discuss, and a lot to report.

Interview by Bernard Harbor ■



Diarmaid Mac a Bhaird.

As part of our year in review series, we look back at a busy year for Fórsa's new look Civil Service division and we talk to new head of division DEREK MULLEN about the year gone by and to look ahead to 2019.

## Brexit and problem solving - the year ahead



Members of the Civil Service DEC at their meeting on Tuesday 11th December.

ALMOST A year on from the creation of Fórsa, it has been a particularly busy and eventful year for the Civil Service division. It was always likely that the formation of Ireland's largest public service union would see the biggest changes occur in the Civil Service division, and that has proven to be the case.

The highlights include the civil service divisional conference in April, Fórsa's national conference in May, the election of Fórsa president Ann McGee and

reaching an agreement on a new entrants pay deal to skip two points on their scale.

### Pay, change and communications

Toward the end of 2018 work was ongoing to finalise agreement on a new starting pay on promotion circular which will simplify the original circular, abolish mark time and ensure that public

servants moving to the Civil Service will retain pay levels as they move across.

There have also been a number of changes at the top of the Civil Service division. Derek Mullen is the new head of the division. This follows the departure of former Fórsa joint general secretary Tom Geraghty, who has taken up a post as deputy chair of the Labour Court.

Derek says it's been as exciting a time as it has been eventful, and is expecting

more of the same in 2019. "There are big issues for the Civil Service division in 2019. My priority will be to ensure that we deal with the members' issues and the detailed agenda arising at General Council, our main industrial relations forum.

*"The establishment of the committee to examine the role of HR shared services - formerly PeoplePoint - was the result of union pressure to address serious issues which had arisen with the system."*

"I will also continue to press for the transition of the state's IR structures, the WRC and the Labour Court. While the conciliation and arbitration scheme has served its purpose, there's no reason why civil servants shouldn't have the same access as all other workers to the states IR services.

"At departmental level, Brexit staffing in customs and agriculture will be a priority too. Organisationally, I want to improve communications with members, ensuring updated information on a regular basis. I also want to work with the divisional executive to ensure they have as much support as they need to carry out their work efficiently and within the new Fórsa structures.

"Recruitment and organising will be a key priority too, particularly among Garda staff where civilianization will see our potential membership double over the next few years," he says.

### Agenda

Looking back on 2018, Derek says a number of agreements were reached that addressed several issues members in the division put to the top of the agenda at both the divisional and national conferences.

Over the summer, Fórsa secured an agreement that will see an additional 10% of all executive officer (EO) posts filled through internal or interdepartmental competition.

The discussions also included a new EO liability agreement that will see the open and interdepartmental liability for EO competitions reduce to 400 posts (from over a thousand), with the process of equalising the sequences to be done

over three years to minimise the impact on internal promotions.

"We also saw the introduction of additional higher scales at CO level. Two days additional annual leave for COs and EOs was also agreed and applied to related service, professional and technical grades.

"A steering committee was also established by the national shared services office (NSSO) in the autumn to examine the role of HR shared services, formally known as PeoplePoint."

The establishment of the committee was the result of union pressure to address serious issues which had arisen with the system. It will oversee work on an official survey of civil servants about their experience of the system, and is tasked with accelerating necessary improvements. Derek warns, however, that the committee's progress has been far too slow to date.

### New entrant pay agreement

In September, newly agreed measures on public service new entrants' pay concluded the task of addressing the two additional points post-2010 recruits had on their pay scales, which meant it took them two years longer to reach the top of their scale.



Derek Mullen.

The measures mean that public servants are now no longer at a long-term disadvantage based on the year in which they were recruited. The measures were agreed two years earlier than originally anticipated, and completed the task which began with merging the pay scales in 2013.

The measures identify two points on each pay scale - year four and year eight - which new entrant public servants will now skip, ensuring an equitable outcome for new entrants in different circumstances.

### Brexit challenge

Casting an eye ahead, Derek says there are a number of issues on the agenda heading into next year. "In particular the implications of Brexit for staffing in Revenue and Agriculture and other departments. A range of HR policies will also be on the table for negotiation, including a proposal for an attendance policy by DPER and ongoing discussions on disciplinary codes.

*"Recruitment and organising will be a key priority too, particularly among Garda staff where civilianization will see our potential membership double over the next few years."*

"We also expect to be negotiating welcome amendments to the annual leave circular with a view to removing the onerous three-year carry over of leave, aspects which can cause members so much difficulty. We will also conduct a review of the family-friendly suite of options in the Civil Service, particularly to deal with concerns arising with schemes such as the shorter working year.

"Another important piece of work we will continue this year is the review of competitive processes in the Civil Service including the use of psychometric testing for shortlisting.

"Discussions on graduate recruitment the role of administrative officers, HEO recruitment, and a new departure arising from the PSSA involving an IT apprenticeship scheme at EO level," he says.

With an expanded, and growing, membership and a full agenda for 2019, Derek says the entire Civil Service divisional executive and industrial team are ready for another busy year ■



Niall Shanahan.

As Fórsa's Education division prepares for its fourth biennial conference in April, we spoke to deputy general secretary KEVIN CALLINAN about the campaign and industrial objectives for this fast-growing division of the union.

# The other faces of education

WITH MORE than 11,000 members working in non-teaching roles throughout the education sector, Fórsa's Education division continues to grow rapidly.

As preparations get underway for the divisional conference in April, Fórsa's School Secretaries branch is finalising its preparations to launch a national campaign to improve secretaries' pay this year.



Kevin Callinan.

Caretakers and secretaries pay rates vary, as they are determined by the individual board of management of each school, and paid from the ancillary grants paid to the schools by the Department of Education and Skills. Almost all are paid below the scale paid to equivalent public service workers.

Under the terms of a 2015 arbitration finding, the payment of four separate pay rises of 2.5 per cent for school secretaries and caretakers were completed on 1st January this year, with the application of a 2.5% pay adjustment.

Kevin said the adjudication finding called on the parties to meet during 2019 in order to agree what would come after the current agreement.

"That's why we're launching a major campaign now to try and influence the political system around this, to try and shape Budget 2020, which will be announced in October, in order to try to achieve pay parity for school secretaries with their public service counterparts.

"We still have members who are employed in the old 1978 scheme, who are on normal public service pay and conditions. All of our members in schools within the ETB system are paid as they should be, on normal public service terms and conditions, and this will be our big push to get that for all school secretaries."

## Support

The branch's voice and identity has grown in recent years, and Kevin says this has helped win support from outside the organisation.

"We've had some very good coverage of the issue, including analysis by Mick Clifford in the *Irish Examiner* and on RTE's *Drivetime* on more than one occasion, in the context of looking at precarious work.

"We've also had great solidarity from the teaching unions, particularly the INTO, and we've certainly had some traction in the political system. I think we're well set now to build on the support we have, and to have a good campaign."

## Technological universities

Already 2019 has seen the establishment of the first technological university in Dublin, following the merger of Dublin, Tallaght and Blanchardstown institutes of technology. Kevin says it marks a very significant change within the higher education sector, and Fórsa members have been deeply engaged with the process to create the new universities.

*"In the dispute on job evaluation in higher education, our members showed great resolve, and there was great leadership shown by the branch."*

"Following quite quickly from the establishment of the new university in Dublin we'll see the creation of the Munster technological university, and one for the South East with Carlow and Waterford institutes of technology, and the possibility of a Connacht/Ulster alliance of Letterkenny, Sligo and Galway/Mayo institutes shortly after.

"I think it should enable the sector to argue for a greater share of state funding for the technology part of the higher education sector. We're affiliated to the Coalition for Public Funding for Higher Education, along with other unions and the USI, and there is a need to push the debate forward on funding higher education this year.

"The opportunities that will emerge from the tech university sector, in terms of research, development and innovation could be significant for the Irish economy, provided that there's good leadership there," he says.

## Job evaluation

Following industrial action and talks at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) last year, a deal was struck which makes provision for the commencement of a job evaluation scheme for library, clerical and administrative and support staff roles in the higher education sector.



Incoming head of division Andy Pike.

The union delegation in the final set of WRC talks was led by incoming head of division Andy Pike.

Kevin says it was vital that the union won the dispute. "There's no doubt, after such a long period with no recruitment, there is a need to give members the opportunity to test whether or not their particular role is being properly graded and remunerated.

"We're doing the preparatory work now to ensure the scheme is effective when it's introduced. It's an important victory. It wasn't an easy dispute, but our members stuck together, showed great resolve, and there was great leadership shown by the branch."

## SNAs

Special needs assistants remain the fastest growing bloc of membership in the union. With 15,000 whole-time-equivalents employed around the country (roughly 18,000 SNAs), Kevin says this makes them a very significant



School secretaries with the Minister.

employment grouping, not just within the school system, but within the economy and society.

Last year's report and recommendations by the NCSE initiated a significant consultation exercise between the union and SNA members nationwide.

"The NCSE consultation meetings – 28 meetings held over a six week period – were hugely positive, and gave the union the opportunity to explain what's happening, as well as allowing SNAs to express their concerns directly about the NCSE recommendations," he says.

"There was a huge amount of consistency from meeting to meeting, so members are very clear about what concerns them. The union is seeking a direct input into the process. That means we expect the NCSE and the department to listen to our concerns and take them on board. Lip service won't be enough.

*"The improved timing of the publication of SNA allocations – won by the union in 2018 – marked a much-needed change."*

"Now that we've been able to hear the views of hundreds of SNAs directly, we're much better equipped to deal assertively with the report and its recommendations, such as the proposal to change the job title to 'inclusion support assistant'.

"I don't find the way this is being done to be an acceptable approach. I'm not saying we can't agree a change of job title but I think just landing in a new title, without consulting the workers

affected, is just not on. It wouldn't happen with any other profession and I don't think we can accept it. Also, we need to guard against any abuse of a change in job title or job role that would result in any detriment to the children to whom the service is provided," he says.

Kevin adds that the improved timing of the publication of SNA allocations – won by the union in 2018 – marked a much-needed change. "We forced the department, under threat of industrial action, to deliver on a commitment to publish the allocations earlier.

"We've had a recent change of minister and we'll have to ensure Minister Joe McHugh is equally aware of the significance of the timely publication of the allocations. In fairness to the department, they said their system has changed, so I'm hopeful that's resolved for good," he adds.

## Push ahead

Kevin says the division will also see work continuing in a number of key areas in education, including efforts to regularise employment conditions for school completion staff, and dealing with the introduction of shared services in the Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

"Our officers and industrial staff continue to have a full agenda for the year ahead, and we'll be hoping to make some significant gains again."

The divisional conference, under the working title of *The other faces of education* will take place in Carrickmacross, County Monaghan from 24th to 26th April ■



Roisin McKane.

The launch of the Fórsa Women's Activist Network took place on Saturday 3rd November 2018 at Fórsa's Nerney's Court Office. This national meeting was the first of a series of new equality networks to be established by the union's Equality committee over the coming months. The meeting was opened by ICTU general secretary Patricia King and featured speakers on the gender pay gap, access to flexible working schemes and the role of women within Fórsa. ROISIN MCKANE captures some of the images and comments from the event.

## Fórsa Women's Activist Network



L-R: Clíodhna McNamara, Angela Kirk, Dr Lisa Wilson, Patricia King, Orla O'Connor, Dr Laura Bambrick, Melissa Brennan and Ann McGee.

"It is important, as a group of active women trying to build this network, that we develop the appropriate strategy so that we can go back to our workplaces and get the issues we speak about today discussed at the highest possible level," Angela Kirk.



Dr Lisa Wilson (left) economist with NERI pictured with Dr Laura Bambrick.

Dr Wilson delved into the importance of flexible work for women in the workplace. "Flexible employment has allowed women to engage in employment while still allowing them to participate in responsibilities they may have outside of the workplace. However, flexible should not mean low paid or poor conditions," Lisa Wilson.



"Gender inequality stems from a range of issues. Until we achieve equal status in all positions of authority, only then will we be in a position to exercise influence, ensuring society operates on the principles of true gender equality," Patricia King.



Engaging and stark conversations took place surrounding sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace. Powerful personal statements about the impact of harassment on women in the workplace, and a strong response by ICTU General Secretary Patricia King on the need to radically change the culture of workplaces that enable and tolerate harassment. "Power and disrespect are huge factors in this. The bottom line is that this shouldn't be tolerated and it must be stopped. Respect is paramount," Patricia King.



Informative and thoroughly enjoyable segment by Laura Bambrick which brought us through the history of women in social policy. Fascinating to see how attitudes towards women since the early 1800's shaped legislation and the tax framework. "1952 see's 12 weeks paid maternity leave for women which was a huge win. However, most won't receive this as they are unable to work due to the marriage bar," Laura Bambrick.



Haryriye Ylldrim and Penny Bartlett.



Jennifer Bradley and Niamh Jordan.



Catriona McEhinney and Marie Little.



Rachael Ingersoll and Aine Bullock.



"The gender pay gap is a direct consequence of women not being recruited into senior roles and continuing their careers. Only 7% of women are surgeons and only 11% of women in IOT's hold senior roles. We have an enormous amount to do in terms of senior positions for women," Orlxa O'Connor, NWCI on the issue of the gender pay gap.



Delegates Dabney Melia and Josefina Riubrugent.



Hazel Gavigan.

Fórsa hosted an international conference looking at the issues of working time, automation and the merits of a four-day week as a model of work for changing times. HAZEL GAVIGAN recorded the event for social media with images, capturing the key comments of the day.

# Working time and future-proofing



Full house of delegates.



Dr Aileen O'Carroll from Maynooth University says from her research, people wouldn't opt to give up their work entirely but would opt to lessen it to work on other projects.



Fórsa president Ann McGee and Anita O'Reilly.



Conny Schoenhardt from German trade union IG Metall that recently negotiated a collective agreement giving workers the option of more money or more self-determination in working hours.



Aine Mannion, David Murphy, Daniel Copperthwaite and Karen McCarthy.



Catherine O'Sullivan and Orla Daly.



Keynote speaker Kate Bell, head of economics and social affairs at the TUC.



Angela Reilly and Stephanie Kelly.



A Q&A with the panel discussing benefits of reduced working time.

Aidan Harper from the Four Day Week campaign explains a working time reduction will lead to greater benefits for our economy, gender equality, society, health and wellbeing, and benefits for the environment too.



"The idea of working to live rather than living to work is not new and has been at the very heart of the trade union and labour movement from the earliest days." - Professor John Ashton, former chairman of the UK Public Health Association.



Anne Ryan from Feasta explaining the need to work towards a just, stable and resilient ecological economy and society, where human and planetary wellbeing are at the centre of all decision making.



Mark Hooper, founder of Indycube Ltd. tells the room "a four-day week is a starting point but it needs to be part of a broader coalition of changes and challenges."

See also pages 28 and 31.



Kevin Callinan.

Almost 90 years ago, the legendary economist John Maynard Keynes predicted that technological change would deliver productivity improvements that would eventually lead to a 15-hour working week. KEVIN CALLINAN, deputy general secretary of Fórsa, says that while new technologies like artificial intelligence threaten at least some of our livelihoods, it's appropriate to ask why all the benefits of that technology seem to be earmarked for a small global elite.

# It's time to talk about working time

KEYNES'S PREDICTION was revolutionary indeed, at a time when working hours were considerably longer than today and when the 'weekend' was not yet a feature of life for the working masses in Ireland, Europe and beyond.

His reasoning was straightforward enough. He correctly said that, by producing more with less, we could cater for our needs while doing less work. This would mean more leisure time with no economic loss.

Even Keynes could scarcely have imagined the productivity gains that have been achieved since he made his prediction, or the accelerated speed of improvement we've seen in recent decades.

Yet the length of the working week has remained more or less the same over the last few decades.

## Control

If anything, we now have less control over our working time with the advent of

the 'gig economy' and the arrival of relatively simple new technologies like remote email facilities and mobile phones, from which we cannot easily disconnect during evenings and weekends.

*"We don't want to inhibit flexibility, but we do want to see worker protections and a fair share of the benefits of new technology."*

Today – not for the first time in history – working time is emerging as one of the central issues in international debates about the future of work.

This is partly due to concerns for the mental and physical health of workers and growing concerns about work-life balance in an age where caring responsibilities – for younger and older

relatives – are growing exponentially, especially for women.

But it's also a fundamental issue of equity in societies where many believe the gains from technological change and new forms of work organisation are not being fairly shared.

## Threat

In a world where new technologies like artificial intelligence are also threatening at least some of our livelihoods, and where modern work practices are making more and more jobs more and more precarious, people are asking why all the benefits seem to be earmarked for a small global elite.

An international conference organised in Dublin by Fórsa last November explored emerging trade union demands for a move towards a four-day week as standard over the coming years.

It followed a call last summer by the Trade Union Congress (the UK equivalent of ICTU), which has put a



four-day week at the centre of its response to automation and productivity-driving technological change.

## Hours

Workers have historically benefited from improvements in technology through reduced working time.

One example is the cut in average working hours. A century ago this was over 60. Now, partly due to more part-time working, it's reduced to just over 30. This has hugely improved the quality of life for workers and their families.

*"We have the chance to fight for a fairer share for everyone, including a four day week."*

The weekend that many of us take for granted was also seen as an unaffordable luxury until around the middle of the twentieth century. Several generations on, we have the chance to fight for a fairer share for everyone, including through a four day week.

Trade unions don't want to impede technological developments in a 21st century Luddite escapade. We know that they have the potential to take a lot of the drudgery and danger out of current workplace tasks while increasing prosperity, including by creating many new jobs.

But we are determined to secure a fairer share of the benefits of economic growth and technological advances for all workers in all sectors of the economy. This would also have the benefit of sharing paid work as technology reduces its availability.

## Fair

Many employers will, of course, continue to require non-standard working hours in the 24/7 economy – and this works for many employees too. We don't want to inhibit flexibility, but we do want to see worker protections and a fair share of the benefits of new technology.

It's already happening in a number of large European economies including France and Germany, where the IG Metall union recently negotiated a deal that included the option for 500,000

workers in 280 companies to reduce their working time.

Fórsa's conference was designed to open up the debate here in Ireland. We already know countries that work fewer hours tend to have higher levels of productivity, as well as greater amounts of wealth per person.

*"The working week has remained more or less the same over the last few decades."*

In this context, a reduction in working time is entirely feasible even within current levels of technology. The benefits for society, gender and age equality, the economy and the environment could be significant.

Kevin's article was originally published in *TheJournal.ie* to coincide with Fórsa's international conference on the future of working time on 22nd November 2018 ■

See also: *Unions call for four-day week*, page 31.

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Bernard Harbor.

# Unions call for four-day working week

## Revised working time ensure workers share fruits of technological change

MOST OF the benefits of increased productivity, achieved through workplace technological change, has gone to a small "global elite," rather than working people.

Speaking at Fórsa's recent international conference on the future of working time in Dublin, deputy general secretary Kevin Callinan (see page 28) said reduced working time was again emerging as one of the central issues in international debates about the future of work.

The conference also heard from Kate Bell, head of economic and social affairs at the UK Trade Union Congress (TUC), which has put the demand for a four-day week at the centre of its response to automation and productivity-driving technological change.

*"Technology enables us to work cheaper and faster, and that should make us all better off."*

"Technology enables us to work cheaper and faster, and that should make us all better off. In Britain, to take just one example, the government estimates that robots and autonomous technology could boost GDP by around £200 billion a year. But if we raise our productivity, isn't it worth asking whether we could be working four days rather than five while producing the same amount?"

"That's how workers have historically benefited from improvements in technology. The reduction in average working hours from over 60 a week in 1868 - 150 years ago - to just over 30 today is one example. The weekend, which was seen as an unaffordable luxury until around the middle of the twentieth century, is another. Several generations on, we have the chance to fight for a fairer share for everyone,



including through a four day week," she said.

The conference, organised by Fórsa, brought together trade unionists and working time experts from Ireland, Germany and the UK. It came in response to the large number of motions about working time submitted to Fórsa's national conference last May, when an executive motion committed the union to work with others to reduce working time in all sectors of the economy.

The conference also heard from Conny Schoenhardt of the German manufacturing union IG Metall, which recently negotiated a deal that included the option for 500,000 workers in 280 companies to reduce their working time.

Aidan Harper, director of the UK-based '4-Day Week Campaign', said international studies show no positive correlation between working hours and wealth. "Countries who work fewer hours tend to have higher levels of productivity, as well as greater amounts of wealth per person. A reduction in

working time is entirely feasible with current levels of technology and the benefits for society, gender equality, the economy and the environment can be significant. Time must become political once again," he said.

*"Conference speakers also highlighted the gender aspects of working time, specifically for women with childcare and other caring responsibilities."*

Conference speakers also highlighted the gender aspects of working time, specifically for women with childcare and other caring responsibilities, as well as the need for workers to have control over their working hours in an era of zero-hours' contracts and other new forms of work organisation ■



Aingeala Flannery.

Overworking is easier to do when the borders between working and living grow more indistinct. Turns out the Japanese and the Germans have words and customs that make a strong case for a shorter working week. AINGEALA FLANNERY gathers a useful lexicon for a better quality of life.

# Work is a four letter word



I HAVE A penchant for foreign words. I like the look of them, the sound of them bouncing around my brain, the feel of them on my tongue – which is not to say that I use them in every day conversation, I don't want to sound like that.

Like what?

Like a *kolyboynick* (Yiddish; noun; a know-it-all).

When it comes to coining clever phrases to describe common phenomena, the Germans are genius at it. How brilliant is this: *kummerspeck* – think *kummerband* – it literally means belly bacon, and describes the roll of fat you get from emotional overeating. And, then there's *schadenfreude*, the pain you feel for the office tyrant and the *Kummerspeck* she's grown after her husband was caught *in flagrante* with the captain of the ladies' golf team. Let's face it,

English lacks the dynamic word power to capture the subtleties of these situations.

Anyway, I learned a couple of zingers last week, I was at an under-11's football match and there was an incident when the opposition keeper, raging after he'd conceded a goal, roared at a defender that he was a 'dufus'. 'That's YouTube, for you,' I remarked to the man beside me, adding that my own son had taken to calling the kitchen tap the faucet.

'It's a Scottish word,' he replied.

'Faucet?'

'No, dufus.'

Turns out, he was an English teacher, with a particular interest in etymology. Oh, says I, aren't the Germans just brilliant at making up words. They were, he said, but really you couldn't beat the

Japanese. He'd spent his twenties teaching in Osaka and there was nothing the Japanese didn't have a word for – umami, for example, the fifth sense of taste, we only copped on to having the year before last, now the hipsters own it. Then he told me about another phenomena the Japanese have nailed with a phrase. *Karoshi*.

"It means 'death by overwork'."

"Wow!" I said.

## Furoshiki

He was surprised I hadn't heard it. Especially since the most high profile case was a journalist: 31 year-old Miwa Sado, who worked almost a hundred hours a week in the month before she died. Her employer was the state broadcaster, an organisation you'd expect to uphold working time

directives, but Miwa, like many Japanese who want to get ahead in their careers, was doing *furoshiki*, literally 'cloaked overtime', a widespread habit of hiding out in the office after hours – clandestine working – that everybody and nobody knows about.

*Karoshi*, I later discovered, is so prevalent in Japan they've had government helplines since the 1980s to prevent it, and yet, it prevails. It is clichéd and dangerous to pretend this is peculiar to Japan, when they've just come up with a name for a scourge that blights us all: the glorification of overwork and the denial of evidence showing how shorter working hours lead to greater productivity.

*"Karoshi (death by overwork) is so prevalent in Japan they've had government helplines since the 1980s to prevent it, and yet, it prevails."*

We've all met workaholics who wear exhaustion like a badge of honour. If you're not too busy, you must be lazy, or an underachiever, or a sponger. In Japan, most callers to the *karoshi* hotlines, are not the over workers (who are typically in denial). No, the callers are their spouses, or their mothers, or their children, distraught at the toll workaholicism is having on their lives: depression, alcoholism, domestic abuse, suicide.

*Kvetching* ('whining', from the Yiddish 'to squeeze or pinch') about work is something we all do to let off steam, but the relief is short-lived. Barely has the complaint exited your lips when you'll say 'at least I'm not picking spuds' or 'it could be worse – I could be digging a well', as if either was a prospect for a systems analyst with a Masters in computer science. The fact that your great-grandfather laboured 16 hours a day seven days a week and was dead at forty-four, doesn't make your workplace any safer. The next time you're cemented to your swivel chair, picking egg salad off your keyboard because you don't have time to leave your desk, take a moment to Google 'symptoms of overwork' – insomnia, exhaustion, anxiety, panic attacks, diabetes, stroke, heart failure. It's all in your head, until it affects the rest of you.

But back to the case of the journalist Miwo Sado. Outside her own profession, I doubt many people think of working in media as a hard slog. I can tell you from twenty years in the industry that the most chronic workaholics I've encountered are journalists, self-declared 'political animals' and 'news junkies', worst among them. They love what they do, so they do what they love – non-stop. Rather than reduce their workload, new media technology has actually heaped more work and deadlines on them. The 24-hour news cycle has a rapacious appetite and they must keep stuffing it with "content", Twitter never sleeps, so they don't either.

## Always on

Nobody distinguishes between print and broadcast journalist anymore. All journalists are digital, this means their work appears in print, online, on digital radio and TV, in podcasts, webcasts and across social media platforms. Automation has allowed journalists to work faster, and therefore their output (quality notwithstanding) is tenfold what it was a decade ago. The number of journalists on payroll is a fraction of what it was a generation ago, and the majority of new entrants work without contracts, and spend the hours they're not working in the so-called 'gig economy', chasing payment, which is always much lower than what 'staffers' are paid for doing the same work. Nobody wants to rattle the cage, for fear of being booted out of it. This is the kind of 'always on' environment that Miwo Sado would have entered as a young journalist.

*"We've all met workaholics who wear exhaustion like a badge of honour."*

I'm writing about media, because it's the sector I'm qualified to comment on. But I know this culture is pervasive – journalists are not a persecuted minority. Burn-out is more than just a buzzword. In his book *Dying for A Paycheck*, Stanford Professor Jeffrey Pfeffer estimates that in the US, workplace stress – such as long hours, job insecurity and lack of work-life balance – contributes to at least 120,000 deaths each year and accounts for up to \$190 billion in health care costs.

## Performance enhancers

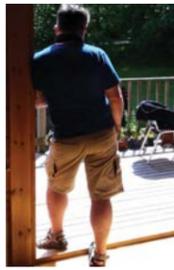
Workplace wellness initiatives don't work, according to Pfeffer. Smoking cessation programmes, nap rooms, yoga mats and juice bars are cosmetic, a mere sticking plaster. "Your tendency to overeat, overdrink, and take drugs are affected by your workplace," he says. "When people like their lives, and that includes work life, they will do a better job of taking care of themselves. When they don't like their lives, they don't."

*"The fact that your great-grandfather laboured 16 hours a day seven days a week and was dead at forty-four, doesn't make your workplace any safer."*

Most worrying, and undocumented, for obvious reasons, is the rise in nootropic drug use in the workplace to enhance performance. For my generation this meant chain-smoking and drinking coffee by the gallon, now it means energy drinks by the crate and secret consumption of so called 'smart drugs' to improve concentration and short-term memory. These range from synthetic creatine, long used by bodybuilders as a performance enhancer, to amphetamines and methylphenidate, including Adderall and Ritalin, commonly prescribed to treat ADHD. Both are addictive and can have serious life-threatening side effects when misused.

## Blessed mealtime

Pfeffer is right, we need to look at the workplace not the worker. Work-life balance is not about improving your diet and your time management skills. Again, I say look to Germany, where last year IG Metall, the juggernaut trade union representing metalworkers won the right for 900,000 of its members to work a 28 hour week where employees need to look after children or elderly and sick relatives. Not only do the Germans have productivity levels the rest of the world envies, they have their priorities straight. Let me tell you about *Mahlzeit*, literally 'blessed mealtime'. It's what they call lunch hour in the German workplace, everybody takes it, and it is absolutely non-negotiable. Think about that the next time you're eating out of a bag at your desk ■



Daniel Devery.

Eating habits change throughout the year and in the early cold months it can be a challenge to get back to a healthier diet after all the midwinter excess. DANIEL DEVERY advises to ditch the guilt and shame of New Year detox plans, stock up on veg and drink some water, it'll be grand.

# Spring greens and good intentions



Photo: dreamstime.com

PICTURE THE scene. It's early in the day before you go back to work after the festivities of New Year.

You wander into the kitchen with vague thoughts of breakfast. You open the fridge. There's a piece of Christmas pudding in a container.

Beside the sink there's a handful of chocolate sweets in a bowl. You turn the

kettle on. Tea will be soothing and give you time to plan breakfast.

As you take the first two sips you grab two of those chocolates to have with the tea.

Well, it's one way to get rid of them.

And so it goes. The remnants of seasonal excess are gradually disposed

of and newspapers and magazines are (ahem) full of advice on new-year-detoxing.

All those salty, fatty, sugary, gooey, boozy treats became the daily norm around the beginning of December. Now you're shoving spinach, kale, blueberries and yoghurt into a blender thinking "five days of this and I'll be grand."

The irony, of course, is that we're forced to believe it's a good idea to switch from one binge to another. Your body has other ideas.

You go into work the next day, and somebody's left a tin of unwanted Danish butter biscuits in the staff kitchen and your new-year-new-you green smoothie revolution crashes to a shame-inducing halt.

Enough of this madness I say.

*"Take your time with preparing a pot like this and you'll even convince the hardened carnivores in the house."*

Remember, that mid-winter festival we recently merried our way through was how our ancestors managed to endure the cold harsh winters without the aid of central heating.

Their harvest plenty provided extra calories for warmth. As the days brightened in the Spring, they worked off the winter excess in the forests, fields and (later) factories.

## Shame

It's the guilt and shame we need to dispense with. All those five-days-to-lose-five-pounds plans are a one way ticket to low self-esteem. How can we switch from feasting to fasting without making ourselves utterly miserable?

Well, let's start small. Think of a few things to have in the store cupboard in the early weeks of the year that will provide nourishment and wellbeing.

Oats are a good place to start. I lost the habit of making porridge a few years ago and revived it just as the cold weather started to bite last year. I turned to YouTube for advice on how to make a decent, creamy porridge.

Jamie Oliver is worth checking out on this. Don't cook oats with milk (the milk scalds) and stir constantly over a gentle heat with a 3:1 ratio of water to oats (and a pinch of salt). In terms of technique it's a like a very simple risotto.

I quickly warmed to this revived daily routine. Light to digest and releasing its energy slowly, this is a breakfast that will keep you going until lunch.

Speaking of lunch, a homemade sandwich will keep costs down and control your portion sizes.

Hungry at 11am? Believe it or not, apples are at their best this time of year,

crispy sweet and refreshing. Keep yourself hydrated, lots of water, and that tin of Danish butter biscuits in the staff kitchen will remain untouched.

## Plan your food

Coming home in these long winter evenings is another challenge entirely. A glass of water will keep your hand out of the last of the chocolates (there's only coffee creams and strawberry fondants left, and nobody likes those anyway) and planning your meals in advance will help you make better choices.

Of course, stretching your finances between the December and January pay days is another challenge.

And that's another good reason to stock up on fresh veg. Another staple I enjoy in the winter months is an all-veg curry.

A pot that combines roasted butternut squash or pumpkin, cauliflower, spinach, chick peas, onions, carrots, celery, tinned tomatoes, coconut milk, garlic, ginger and spices (or some variation combining a range of these ingredients) can be cooked slowly at the weekend and provide an easy dinnertime option with freshly cooked wholegrain rice, and some steamed green veg on the side.

*"Now you're shoving spinach, kale, blueberries and yoghurt into a blender thinking 'five days of this and I'll be grand.'"*

Take your time with preparing a pot like this and you'll even convince the hardened carnivores in the house. Your body - and the planet - could use a rest from all that mid-winter animal fat consumption.

## Have a brew

Having waded through a small lake of red or white wine during the festivities, probably best to just knock it on the head for a few weeks, or confine it to the weekend. Not to sound too po-faced about all this, but herbal teas make a soothing and tasty alternative as you put your feet up to rest for the evening.

And there you have it. It's not a diet or a detox plan, just a different way to think about how we can ease ourselves into the brighter evenings and leave behind all the glorious excess of the mid-winter.

It'll be grand ■

# Jack and Samin

JACK MONROE is more than just a food writer. A UK journalist and activist who campaigns on food poverty and hunger relief - her blog, *A Girl Called Jack*, documented Monroe's experience of preparing nutritious food while surviving on benefits.



In an age when reliance on food banks for working families has been somehow normalised, Monroe is a vocal critic of the austerity policies that have made food poverty a reality in one of the world's wealthiest countries.

Monroe's latest book, *Cooking on a Bootstrap* was initially launched last year as a limited edition on Kickstarter. Monroe reached the funding target in just one day, and donated 500 copies to UK food banks.

Monroe was named 'best food personality' at the Observer Food Monthly awards in 2018.

Check out @BootstrapCook on Twitter for recipes, campaigns and more.



Samin Nosrat (@CiaoSamin) first came to my attention when she appeared in Michael Pollan's excellent Netflix series *Cooked*.

She now has her own Netflix series, based on her best-selling book *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat*.

While cooking at the famed Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkely, California at the start of her career, she noticed that, amid the chaos of the kitchen, these four key principles were applied by her fellow chefs to make their food taste better.

I heartily recommend the Netflix show. If that inspires you, the book needs to go on your 2019 wish list ■



Una-Minh Kavanagh.

New Year celebrations have come and gone and for many of those easing themselves into 2019, it's time to book their travels in anticipation of the summer. While places like Alicante, Tenerife and Barcelona are staples for Irish holidaymakers, these days there are more deals for travellers and people are now willing to go further afield. UNA-MINH KAVANAGH looks at some of the top summer holiday destinations for 2019.

# Destination summer



Sri Lanka.

TOPPING MANY lists for travellers in 2019 is Sri Lanka. The island nation just south of India is well known for its welcoming people, cheap prices and breath-taking scenery. Despite its size, the country caters to every sort of tourist.

Love the ocean? Sri Lanka has a long history of scuba diving, snorkelling and surfing. Nature lovers will be spoiled for choice with its rich biodiversity and wildlife, and there's a multitude of roads that wind through mountains, forests and paddy fields as you're taking in the Sri Lankan culture.

Things like safaris will boost the cost of your stay but food, accommodation and transport are generally very cheap. Also, it offers the opportunity to lounge on quiet beaches. Depending on your funds, you can easily roam on a backpacker's budget or splash out on more luxurious experiences.

## Morocco

With warm sun all year around and just four hours in the air from Dublin, Morocco offers a feast for the senses.

Wind through the bustling souks of Marrakech where a burst of colour awaits or unwind by the sun-soaked shores of Agadir, while the port city of Tangier is enjoying a bit of a revival as a destination.

If you love the great outdoors and lush green valleys, the highest mountain range in North Africa, the Atlas Mountains, are also scattered with historical ruins, markets and mosques. With kasbahs rising from the desert, ancient bazaars as well as the more modern conveniences, Morocco will delight new holidaymakers.

## The Maldives

When people think of the Maldives, they usually imagine it to be one of those destinations that oozes luxury with ocean-based cabins and white sands. This glorious paradise was once known for being inaccessible for those with limited funds. However, the latest trends suggest that it's becoming more affordable as the years go on. Instead of those fancy resorts, consider AirBnB or small guesthouses. For an authentic experience, at guesthouses you can often eat Maldivian cuisine as a group or with the owner's family which is included in the price. You can still get all the access to those gorgeous white beaches and crystal blue ocean too.

## Namibia

Namibia gets an average of 300 days of sunshine annually. From June to September, however, it's considered "winter time" with temperatures of between 20-24°C; ideal for Irish people who can't handle the heat.



Namibia.

Not only that but due to the country's low population density it makes it the perfect spot to go stargazing. NamibRand Nature Reserve in Namibia is one of the top places for getting the most out of the midnight sky. One of the country's biggest draws is its vibrant red sand dunes which are said to be the highest in the world.

## Panama

Cheaper than its bustling neighbour, Costa Rica, Panama is nestled in the Caribbean and boasts clear blue waters on one side and the swells of the Pacific Ocean on the other.

A slice of paradise, snorkel your way through Panama's reefs, zip line through rainforests or simply bask in this culturally diverse country. Famous for The Panama Canal, which connects the Atlantic with the Pacific, its capital is also cosmopolitan and edgy with shimmering skyscrapers and Art Deco gems similar to cities like Miami.



Greenland.

The country has seven indigenous groups that you can visit through sustainable tourism so there's plenty to appreciate here. Good news too, if you're Irish and visiting this country for less than 90 days as a tourist, you don't need to get a visa.

## Greenland

Sounds strange, doesn't it? But Greenland in the summer offers a fantastic contrast to what's usually a snow-covered country most of the year. Though three-quarters of Greenland is covered by the only permanent ice sheet outside Antarctica, when the water melts away what it leaves is an abundance of wildlife with flowers and lush wilderness clinging to hillsides.

While not the most heavily populated country (55,000), it still boasts small communities that are full of life and deeply connected with nature. Catered more to the outdoorsy types, visitors can cycle to Russell Glacier, enjoy the scenery by foot or explore the southern part of the island by kayak.

There are also many expedition cruises that tourists can avail of where you can take in the surrounding icebergs, polar bears and whales.

## Croatia

Croatia these days is an absolute travel hotspot but instead of heading to the insanely popular Dubrovnik and Zagreb, why not pop over to Makarska instead?

While it's worth heading to the former cities, this port city at the foot of the

Biokovo Mountain is known for its picturesque scenery and historical old town centre. It's also right on the Adriatic Sea.



Zlatni Rat (Golden Cape) on the island of Brač in Croatia.

The city is known for its Mediterranean vegetation and long, warm summers which are delightfully cooled by a breeze known as the Maestral. Nearby is the second largest city in Croatia, Split. You can also plan day trips to nearby Brač, one of over 1,000 Croatian islands best known for the unique peninsular white-pebble beach Zlatni Rat (Golden Cape).

## Slovenia

Sandwiched between Italy, Hungary and Austria, this small country has a slice of coastline also on the Adriatic Sea. Those who love architecture may consider heading to its capital Ljubljana which sports a mix of Baroque, Renaissance and Art Nouveau buildings.

Alternatively, take in a contrasting experience by visiting karst caves and the rolling hills and forests. From June to September visitors flock to Lake Bled which has the longest swimming season of an Alpine lake in Europe. Not only that, Slovenia boasts approximately 2,000 hours of sunshine a year ■



Niall Shanahan.

Continuing their strong track record for innovative theatre and performance, thisispopbaby returned to the stage of the Project Arts Centre recently with a powerful and personal show about one of Ireland's great icons of cultural activism, Tonie Walsh. NIALL SHANAHAN was there.

# I am Tonie Walsh

*I AM Tonie Walsh* tells the story of Ireland's seismic social change from the perspective of someone who lived through it, gloriously, in full technicolour and (mostly) after dark.

As we enter the upstairs theatre space at Project Arts Centre, the stage is surrounded on three sides by the audience. At the centre of this arrangement, the floor is adorned with a large pink triangle, a symbol with a complicated history but synonymous with the gay rights movement.

Within this space stands a DJ, our host for the evening. He's spinning discs on two turntables as the audience take their seats. He is the living legend, club impresario, DJ, activist, historian, 'Godfather of Gay' in Ireland and master storyteller Tonie Walsh.

*"'Transgression' has been both a personal trademark and a badge of honour, and the word emerges again several times over the course of the evening."*

Written by Walsh and Philip McMahon, and directed by Tom Creed, what follows is a powerful and engaging trip through time in Tonie's charming and lyrical company.



Living legend and master storyteller Tonie Walsh.

By his own admission, Tonie Walsh has been making a show of himself his whole life. He has thrown Dublin's most seminal parties, and came second place in the inaugural Alternative Miss Ireland in 1987. 'Transgression' has been both a personal trademark and a badge of honour, and the word emerges again several times over the course of the evening.

For decades he has fought tirelessly for civil rights - for housing rights, women's rights, and queer rights - while the country changed around him. This is part memoir, part manifesto, as Tonie is also here to tell us why there's still fire in his belly.

## Hirschfeld

Tonie takes us on a whistle-stop tour of his family's own fascinating history, steeped both in bohemianism and activism. His mother a classically trained dancer, and father a musician, Tonie conjures them to life for us, hinting at the roots of his own life-long love of music and dance.

Dublin is, and always has been, his playground and his stage since he made the move from Clonmel in the late 1970s. Within a few months of his discovery of Dublin's Hirschfeld Centre in Temple Bar, he's on the board of the National Gay Federation (NGF) which was founded in 1979.

The Hirschfeld Centre was Ireland's first LGBT community centre, named after the prominent German doctor and sexologist, Magnus Hirschfeld, and established at a time when a run-down Temple Bar was in mortal danger of being turned into a bus station.

The Hirschfeld included a meeting space, café, cinema and a nightclub that



Tonie argues that the major gains of the progressive campaigns of his lifetime are merely foundations for the remaining work to be done.

would eventually become known as *Flickers*, the birthplace of Dublin's dance culture. This was the beating heart of Ireland's gay subculture and Tonie brings it lovingly to life.

The centre was destroyed by fire on 4th November 1987. However, the cultural and activist movement that started there would forge on. In one of the show's finer metaphors, the twin decks upon which Walsh plays classic tracks by Viola Wills, Pet Shop Boys and Aretha Franklin (check out the *I am Tonie Walsh* playlist on Spotify) are revealed as the very decks that survived the Hirschfeld fire.

## Pride and joy and grief

The Hirschfeld was the epicentre of Irish gay culture at a time when to be openly gay was still fraught with significant

personal risk, the brutal truth of which is revisited in Tonie's account of the death of Aer Rianta worker Declan Flynn.

Flynn was attacked and killed in Dublin's Fairview Park in 1982. His murder, and the fact that those who murdered him walked free, became the catalyst for the LGBTQ Pride movement in Ireland, bringing together a broad range of supporters, including trade unions.

As Tonie takes us through the 1980s, the devastation of AIDS is both global and personal. Close friends are conjured on to the stage. We get to know them and, in this intimate telling, we are exposed to the raw and brutal grief the AIDS crisis imposed upon those left behind. We are also reminded, in stark personal terms, that it is with us still.

But happier times are retold throughout. Nights of blissful play on the

dancefloors of Dublin are recalled as the darkness of the 1980s segues into the sense of seismic change that Tonie witnesses when he returns to Dublin in 1991 following a London hiatus.

## Powderbubble

The passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) 1993 Bill in June 1993, five years after the ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, and 16 years after Senator David Norris took his case to the Irish courts, marks a watershed. Irish people would no longer be treated as criminals, just because of who they were.

*"This is part memoir, part manifesto, as Tonie is also here to tell us why there's still fire in his belly."*

And this is a turning point that coincides with Ireland's development as an outward-looking and confident country. This is also when Tonie's career as club impresario comes into its own.

Collaborating with graphic designer Niall Sweeny, Panti creator Rory O'Neill and Karim Rehmani-White, Ham Productions is the collective behind club nights like *Gag* and *Powderbubble*, marking a new era of Dublin nightlife, where the wider community is grooving to the intoxicating beat of the transgressive drums, and where the seeds of a more inclusive Ireland are nurtured.

## Love and care

Walsh returned to Clonmel to care for his mother in the last years of her life, and his intimate portrait of providing care is powerfully moving. The finale of the show is a rallying call to arms, as well as a salute to absent friends.

Tonie remains highly charged on a range of issues, from housing to sexual health and human rights. He argues that the major gains of the progressive campaigns of his lifetime are merely foundations for the remaining work to be done.

His challenge to us all, as we raised our glasses, is to get back out there and see that it's done.

This sold-out show had a short run in Dublin's Project Arts Centre last November, concluding on World AIDS Day, 1st December. The company plans to tour the show in 2019. Subscribe at [thisispopbaby.com](http://thisispopbaby.com) for details ■



Raymond Connolly.

It's a little known fact that RAYMOND CONNOLLY, before being called to the bar in 1978 ("last orders folks!") was a scholar of the classics. When approached to share his thoughts on musical matters for this edition, he replied "Reversi Sint enim Deorum est fortis." We had to look it up: "The Gods of Rock have returned," says he. He was referring to the return of Queen and Elton John in the form of the rock music biopic. He's not impressed.

# Bohemian Rocketman

"Almost always, the creative dedicated minority has made the world better" - Martin Luther King Jr.

"Where's the Judean People's Popular Front? ... That's him over there" - The Life of Brian.

I'VE ALWAYS been okay with minority groups. I never minded the populist goading of Man United and Liverpool supporters in the pre Wenger-era. They would often ask me if it was true that the Dublin Arsenal Supporters Club held its meetings in a telephone box on the quays.

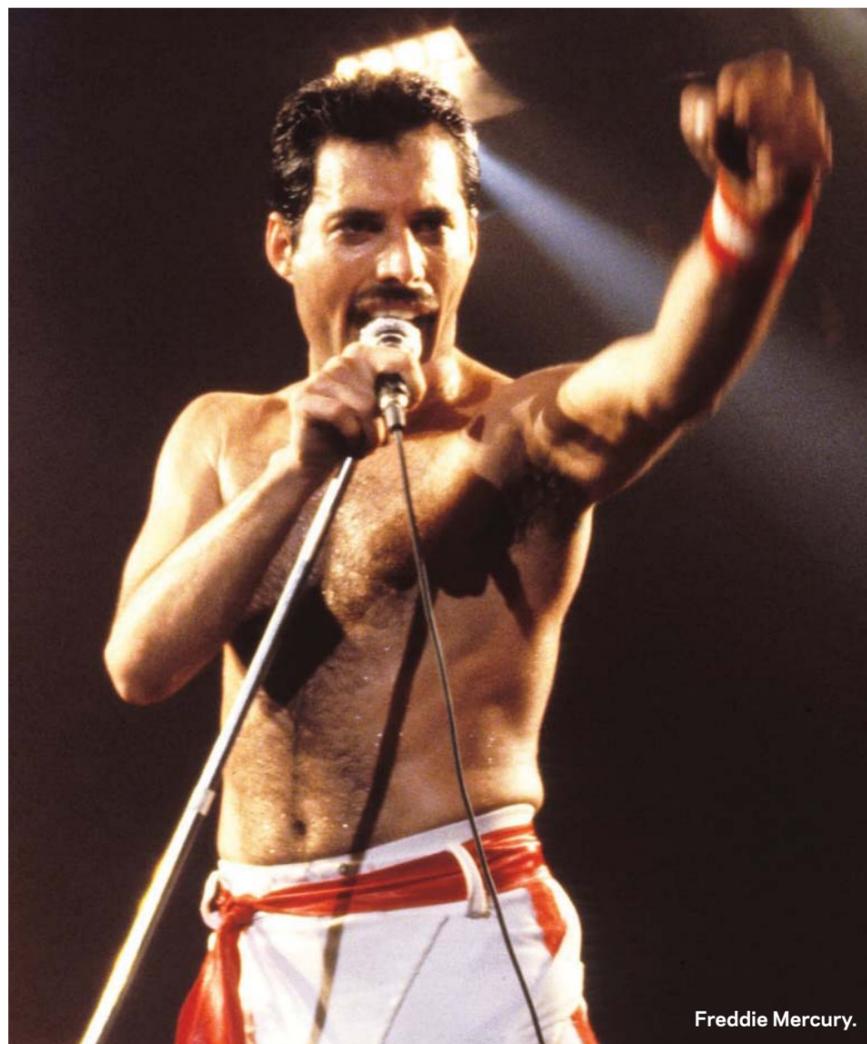
Recently, my minority status has been once again established as I didn't feel compelled to race out to see Freddie Mercury biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody*. If I was served a subpoena compelling me to go and see this film I would shred it.

I suspect my editor has been swept up in this populist rock god fever. Publicly, I'm sure he claims to be appalled by the film's sanitised revisionism and simplification of Mercury's life story [Editor's note: Maybe.]. But I bet he still watches Anton Corbijn's pretentious low-fi black and white biopic of Joy Division's Ian Curtis, *Control* (2007), at least once a year [Editor's note: Yes. Yes I do.]

This contradiction, naturally, represents a gross double standard. If there's one constant pursued in this column, it's the need to assimilate double standards into a singularity of purpose.

## Marmite

As a band, Queen are like Marmite - love it or hate it - as our EU-departing neighbours might say. In all my years of grocery shopping in Dublin 11, I've yet



Freddie Mercury.

to see a single jar of Marmite purchased or stolen. But, for an old mod boy, I've much admiration for some of Queen's antics and innovation.

"*Bohemian Rhapsody* is a can of earworms, one of those musical confections that gets into your head whether you like it or not, and stays there forever" says A.O. Scott of the New York Times, and he's spot-on.

They were, for me, always a bit over the top musically, but even the grimmest of my music critic anorak associates could not take away credit for marvellous innovation and a lot of raw cheek. Roger Daltrey serves high praise for Freddie Mercury: "The man has got a lot of balls. He's an original." I can't argue with that.

Nobody else could have gotten away with Mercury's 1978 paean to what

actually makes the rockin' world go round; it's Freddie and that's okay. Just as Laurel and Hardy shared a double bed in the 1930s without attracting outrage, when you're good you're good.

## Live Aid

Anyone I've spoken to about the movie talks about the climactic re-creation of Queen's seminal 1985 *Live Aid* performance. While it's probably a huge technical achievement to have recreated it in so much detail, I can't help thinking, "lads, it's on YouTube."

*"It wasn't a corny biopic, just a good old fashioned big screen concert, and it's still getting the odd sold-out screening at Dublin's Sugar Club."*

I might as well tell you, I was disappointed with Queen's set list on *Live Aid*. The set consisted of *Bohemian Rhapsody/Radio Ga-Ga/Ay-Oh/Hammer to Fall/Crazy Little Thing Called Love/We Will Rock You/We are the Champions*.

My disappointment remains that there was no *Killer Queen/Seven Seas of Rhye/Fat-Bottomed Girls/Another One Bites the Dust* and maybe *Killer Queen* again! Call me a contrarian (everyone else does), but that's a better set list.

Instead of following the mob down to your local Cineplex to see the rest of the band settle old scores about who really wrote the big Queen hits, have a look at Queen's 1975 performance at the Hammersmith Odeon.

It was broadcast by the BBC's *The Old Grey Whistle Test* and is readily available on YouTube. It has a lot more substance than Rami Malek donning a set of prosthetic teeth and declaring "tonight Matthew, I'm going to be Freddie Mercury."

## Reginald

Also coming to a cinema near you is *Rocketman* featuring Sir Elton Hercules John CBE or (to his ma) Reginald Kenneth Dwight.

There's always room for the journey from the sublime and the ridiculous but I still cannot fathom how one and the same artist can produce *Rocketman* and *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* and then churn out cheese like *Candle in the Wind* and *Nikita*. I reckon he got lucky early doors.



Elton John.

Is the movie industry going to continue turning out a succession of biopics to preserve the status of the rock god?

*"Is the movie industry going to continue turning out a succession of biopics to preserve the status of the rock god? If so, mister producer I have a movie pitch for you."*

If so, mister producer, I have a movie pitch for you. It's called *Dave Lee Roth is Great Craic* and opens with mister DLR himself grinning at the camera and saying "I used to jog but the ice cubes kept falling out of my glass" or "I'm a family oriented guy, I've personally started four or five this year."

You can contact me via the editor.

## This must be the place

I recall fondly the Friday night screenings of *Stop Making Sense* in Dublin's Ambassador Cinema in the mid-

80s. A Talking Heads live concert filmed by the late, great Jonathan (*Silence of The Lambs*) Demme.

It wasn't a corny biopic, just a good old fashioned big screen concert, and it's still getting the odd sold-out screening at Dublin's Sugar Club.

Late-night drinking at that time was confined to posh wine bars on Leeson St and Northsiders didn't know where Leeson St was, or indeed what wine was.

Freddie himself once said "when I'm dead I want to be remembered as a musician of some worth and substance". In Freddie's honour, I recommend you take out the albums *Sheer Heart Attack* and *Night at the Opera* and listen to *Bring back Leroy Brown/Good Company/Seaside Rendezvous and Death on Two Legs*.

In the meantime, I'm off to check when BBC4 is next re-running 'The Kinks - Village Green Preservation Society' and maybe follow it up with a trivia quiz on the subject.

Is this the real life, or is this just fantasy? ■

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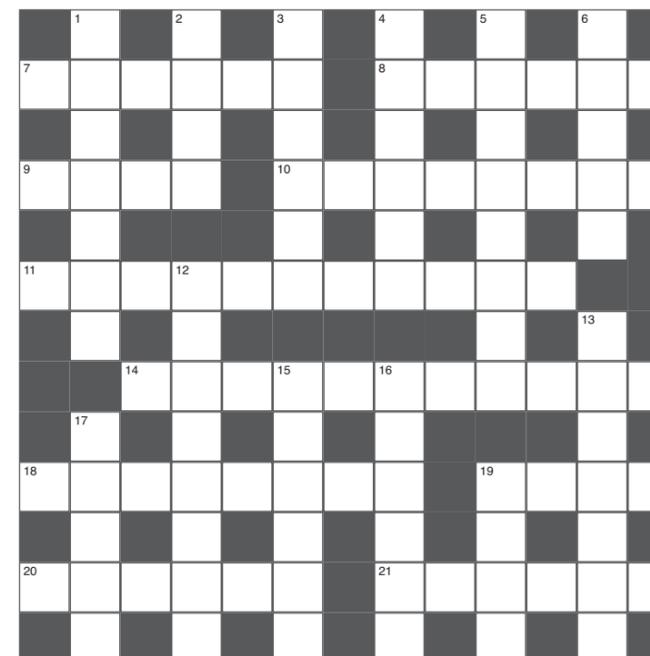
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## Win win win

### WIN €50 PRIZE CROSSWORD

Win €50 by completing the crossword and sending your entry, name and address to Hazel Gavigan, Fórsa crossword, Fórsa, Nerney's Court, Dublin, D01 R2C5, by Friday 8th March 2019. We'll send €50 to the first correct entry pulled from the hat.



Crossword composed by Peter Connaughtan.

#### ACROSS

- Bahamian capital and D2 street (6)
- Chairman of the PLO, he died in 2004 (6)
- The largest organ of the human body (4)
- Rugby stadium in Cape Town (8)
- A fear of water, also a symptom of rabies (11)
- I shrank a sad family (11)
- Yuletide comedy, starring Billy Bob Thornton (3,5)
- Claude founded a renowned champagne house in 1743 (4)
- Dish of pork sausages, rashers, spuds and onions (6)
- U.S. state, capital Topeka (6)

#### DOWN

- Daniel Day Lewis character found in Croke Park (7)
- Numeric book identifier, in short (1,1,1,1)
- Pi - a root vegetable (6)
- Former South Korean moto manufacturer (6)
- In Japan, ritual disembowelment, also known as Seppuku (8)
- One of only three players to retain the U.S. Masters (5)
- Gershwin wrote this in blue (8)
- The Patella (7)
- How tight is the fabric measurement? (6)
- In West Side Story, the rivals of the Jets (6)
- Fair City character played by Aisling O'Neill (5)
- These Clouds won the 2015 Grand National (4)

#### ISSUE 4 (AUTUMN-WINTER) WINNERS:

**CROSSWORD:** Thomas Coll, Donegal. **QUIZ:** Gemma Harris, Co. Dublin. **SURVEY:** Aisling McGovern, Dublin 2.

#### ISSUE 4 (AUTUMN-WINTER) CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:

**ACROSS:** 7. Sabana 8. Enamel 9. Opal 10. Cardigan 11. Leif Erikson 14. Simona Halep 18. Moussaka 19. Gift 20. Alkali 21. Allure **DOWN:** 1. Harpies 2. Hell 3. Cancer 4. Henrik 5. Manito 6. Regan 12. Friesian 13. Wexford 15. Oxalic 16. Avatar 17. Fools 19. Gold

## PRIZE QUIZ

WIN €50

Just answer five easy questions and you could win €50.

YOU COULD have an extra €50 to spend by answering five easy questions and sending your entry, name and address to Hazel Gavigan, Fórsa prize quiz, Fórsa, Nerney's court, Dublin, D01 R2C5. We'll send €50 to the first completed entry pulled from the hat.\* All the answers can be found in the pages of this magazine.

- Queen classic Bohemian Rhapsody is described by New York Times critic AO Scott as a can of what?**
  - Worms
  - Lager
  - Beans
  - Earworms
- Fórsa president Ann McGee hails from:**
  - Ferbane, Offaly
  - Inchicore, Dublin
  - Dromahair, Leitrim
  - Tyrrellspass, Westmeath
- What's the UK food writer and activist Monroe's first name?**
  - Marilyn
  - Matt
  - Jack
  - Jill
- Fórsa was formed on which date in 2018?**
  - 1st January
  - 2nd January
  - 3rd January
  - 4th January
- Which Kevin is Fórsa's deputy general secretary?**
  - Bacon
  - Foley
  - Callinan
  - Kline

**The small print\***  
You must be a paid-up Fórsa member to win. Only one entry per person (multiple entries will not be considered). Entries must reach us by Friday 8th March 2019. The editor's decision is final. That's it!

## YOUR VIEW

WIN €100

# How do you like *Fórsa*?

WE HOPE you enjoyed this issue of *Fórsa*, the magazine for *Fórsa* members. We want to hear your views, and we're offering a €100 prize to one lucky winner who completes this questionnaire.



Simply complete this short survey and send it to Hazel Gavigan, *Fórsa* survey, *Fórsa*, Nerney's Court, Dublin, D01 R2C5. You can also send your views by email to hgavigan@forsa.ie. We'll send €100 to the first completed entry pulled from a hat.\*

## The survey

### 1. What did you think of the articles in the winter-spring 2019 issue of *Fórsa*?

- Excellent
- Good
- Okay
- Bad
- Awful

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. What did you think of the layout, style and pictures in the winter-spring 2019 issue of *Fórsa*?

- Excellent
- Good
- Okay
- Bad
- Awful

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. What were your favourite three articles?

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. What were your least favourite articles?

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. What subjects would you like to see in future issues of *Fórsa*?

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

### 6. What did you think of the balance between union news and other articles?

- The balance is about right
- I want more union news
- I want less union news

### 7. Any other comments? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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*Fórsa* branch \_\_\_\_\_

The small print\*

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