

FAQs – Local Government Job Evaluation Dispute

Update 19 September 2023

Fórsa members in local authorities are taking industrial action as part of our dispute to achieve job evaluation in the sector.

Job evaluation is the process which assesses if a job's grade is properly matched to its duties and responsibilities.

Members working in the local authority sector voted for action by over 85% to give Fórsa a mandate.

This follows the abject failure of the sector management to engage meaningfully in the resolution of the dispute, despite having committed to doing so in the joint referral to the Workplace Relations Commission, which stated:

Both the LGMA and Fórsa request that the WRC urgently reconvene conciliation on the issue of job evaluation in the local government sector. The employer and union are committed to engaging meaningfully and constructively to resolve this issue over the coming weeks. To that end, we respectfully request that the WRC arrange urgent conciliation with both parties as a matter of urgency.

The initial industrial action began with an indefinite ban on engagement on all non-statutory political representations (verbal, email and written) on the 11th September 2023. **This will be followed by a 24-hour email ban on Friday 22nd September and a 48-hour phone ban on Tuesday 26 September and Wednesday 27th September.**

Local Authorities management can make applications for derogation requests for emergency or critical cover. Fórsa remains available to discuss such derogation requests, providing that it is genuine emergency cover and limited in nature.

What is job evaluation?

Job evaluation is a process for working out the relative worth (grade for the job) of posts in an organisation based on what the post-holder is doing or is expected to do. It is carried out so that fair levels of pay for different jobs can be set rather than be based on subjective criteria or assumptions.

What is the problem in the Local Government sector?

Fórsa argues that almost 10,000 council jobs were lost following the financial crisis. Services were only maintained because staff had taken on additional responsibilities above their pay grades. In the public sector, Local Authorities suffered the greatest reduction of numbers of employees during the austerity era, which has resulted in significant grade drift in the sector. This means that many workers are carrying out the duties at a higher level.

What happens elsewhere?

Local Authority workers in the North and right across Britain have had access to job evaluation for decades. It is also commonplace across much of Europe. In Ireland, many Fórsa grades represented in the HSE and higher education have access to job evaluation.

What do others say?

IHREC (Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission) have published a Code of Conduct for Employers stating, *“a pay review – incorporating, as part of the process, a rational and objective job evaluation model – is the most effective way of achieving pay equality”*.

So, what’s the problem?

The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) maintains that everyone working in the Local Authority sector is paid the appropriate rate for the job. They reject that people are working above grade. Fórsa believes that the only way to deal with this matter is through an independent job evaluation exercise. Local Authorities were once the employer of choice but that is no longer the case. There is a recruitment and retention crisis in the sector that is getting worse. Addressing this issue will help.

Fórsa industrial action ban on non-statutory political representations

The first stage of this industrial action is a ban on non-statutory political representations. Engaging with politicians can be a routine part of the job of workers in Local Government. Whilst we are not in conflict with public representatives, banning such work is a legitimate activity aimed at pressurising the employer to resolve our dispute. This ban continues to be in operation.

Who does the ban cover?

All public representatives; Councillors, Senators, TDs (including Ministers) and MEPs.

What is covered?

Members are instructed not to undertake the following tasks:

- Emails, telephone calls, texts, letters, with Councillors, Senators, TDs (including Ministers) and MEPs.
- Assistance with Councillor queries/parliamentary questions
- Face-to-face discussions about work queries from public elected reps.
- Provision of routine updates from the Council centrally and at Municipal District level on issues such road closures, water, street cleaning etc.

What is allowed?

Currently the following is allowed, though may be reviewed at a later stage as part of any escalation exercise:

- Should you regularly attend monthly Council meetings/Municipal District Councils, Area Committee meetings /Special Policy Committees this can continue.
- Assistance with agendas, papers etc, should that currently form part of your job, this can continue.

FoI requests submitted in the normal fashion via the dedicated FoI Officer/liaison

What should members say to public reps?

We would encourage members to explain/reiterate the legitimacy and necessity of the action. Advise elected representatives to contact the Chief Executive to resolve the dispute.

We have written to public representatives outlining our dispute. [The guidance issued to them is available HERE](#). We have been encouraged by the show of cross-party support we have had from political representatives.

How will the email ban operate?

- A **24-hour email ban** will begin on Friday 22nd September at 00.01am running to 23.59pm on 22nd September 2023. This will include sending of, and responding to, all emails, internal and external.

What should I say in my 'out of office' message?

If you have the option of setting a personalised 'out of office' automatic reply, you might consider adapting the following message:

- "This email address is not being monitored for 24hours as Fórsa trade union members undertake industrial action calling for a job evaluation scheme. Visit <https://www.forsa.ie/faq-local-government-job-evaluation-dispute/> for more information."

How will I manage my inbox after the email ban ends?

At your normal starting time on your next day of work adopt your usual methodology for reviewing emails received, taking into account date of receipt and urgency. We acknowledge that this might take a lot of time and you should not put yourself under undue pressure.

How will the phone ban operate?

- This will be followed by a **48-hour telephone ban** on Tuesday 26th September and Wednesday 27th September, beginning at 00.01am on 26th September, running to 23.59pm on 27th September 2023. This will include calls on work landline phones and mobile phones, work telephone calls via online platforms such as MS teams and work calls via social media platforms such as WhatsApp, whether phone or video and calls on personal mobile phones for work issues.

Does this include logging on/ logging off when working remotely?

No. This can continue as per existing practices, it is not a breach of the action.

What about emergencies?

Management can request derogations for emergency or critical cover. Fórsa remains available to discuss derogation requests for emergency cover, providing that it is genuine emergency cover and limited in nature.

Will there be further action?

Yes. There will be further escalation of the industrial action if the employer fails to engage with us in order to resolve the dispute.

I'm not a member of Fórsa, what should I do during the dispute?

Have you thought about joining the union? Your colleagues are fighting hard for your rights. The more people who join, the more strength we have. It's never been [easier to join Fórsa](#).

Once your membership has been ratified, you must follow the work to rule instruction.

Do you have any materials I can display?

Yes. [You can download this poster to distribute and display in your workplace](#).

I have some more questions, not answered above. Who do I contact?

You should contact your local branch. If you are unsure of who to contact, please contact your closest Fórsa office:

- Cork 021 4255 210 forsacork@forsa.ie
- Limerick 061 319 177 forsalimerick@forsa.ie
- Galway 091 778 031 forsagalway@forsa.ie
- Sligo 071 914 2400 forsasligo@forsa.ie
- Dublin Head Office: 01 8171500 lgaction2023@forsa.ie