



NEW UNION PROJECT

BALLOT on the creation of FÓRSA trade union

The draft rules of FÓRSA trade union and the Instrument of Amalgamation are available on your union's website and from your local branch secretary.

1. Background

The New Union Project is over three years old and the proposal being balloted on is the product of lengthy and detailed negotiations between representatives of three public service unions – CPSU, IMPACT and PSEU. The project evolved from an ICTU-sponsored study on the future of Irish trade unions – *The Trade Union Commission* – whose report argued strongly that unions here would have to reorganise and rationalise to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

2. Arriving at the proposal

The detailed negotiations were carried out by the general secretaries and the elected presidents and vice presidents of each of the unions. Sub-groups of elected executive members were also involved and several meetings of all three elected executive committees took place. An external and independent financial consultant, Mazars, was commissioned to carry out a due diligence examination of the financial circumstances of the three unions. This reported positively on all three. An external communications company, Red Dog, was commissioned to consult and advise on a name and identity for the proposed new union. Each union reported developments in the project to their delegate conferences each year leading up to approval by all three unions in 2016 for a ballot on bringing about the New Union to be held before the end of 2017.

3. Why a New Union?

All three unions' members, in common with all workers, experienced the hardships caused by the economic crash and cuts in pay, conditions and jobs imposed by employers. While the unions have weathered the storm it is abundantly clear that as individual unions we were not best placed to protect our members' interests. This project will bring three separate unions within the public service together into an organisation with over 80,000 members and financial reserves of €85 million, including a dispute fund of €50 million. The project aims to build a larger, stronger and more powerful organisation that will represent our members better than we can as smaller individual unions. The new organisation will have one strong voice to deal with the State as one employer. The broad base of the New Union would also enable enhanced support for members outside the public service.

4. Safeguarding identity and culture

All three unions have proud histories and identities. It is important that the new organisation will be inclusive and reflective of those traditions. To that end the negotiators have created an organisation with as few changes as possible to existing structures and representational arrangements. Safeguards, including an independent external appeals process, have been built into the rules of the proposed New Union to give reassurance to individuals or groups of members who may feel less well served, and to build equivalent and professional grade co-operation across the New Union. Decisions affecting members in each sector (such as the civil service, health, and so on) will be made by the members in that sector and not by those of any other sector. Issues affecting a grade within a sector will be decided solely by representatives of that grade in that sector.

5. Benefits

The New Union will have considerably more buying power than any of the individual unions. Existing individual union benefit schemes will continue, but additional new benefits have been negotiated which include:

- €5,000 payment for an illness where the member is out of work for 12 months
- €5,000 payment where the member is suffering from a critical illness
- €5,000 payment for a personal accident
- €5,000 payment on the death of a member
- €5,000 payment on the death of a spouse/qualifying partner
(*terms and conditions apply – see details of scheme*)
- Up to €250,000 emergency evacuation/repatriation costs if deceased, injured or taken seriously ill while abroad.

6. Resources

The new organisation will have a combined staff of 120 (67 officials and 53 administration). Economies of scale will mean existing industrial representation will be enhanced and staff resources will become available to build dedicated specialist services as the project evolves. In particular, the New Union will have a professional communications unit, an extensive organising unit and a rights and information unit.

Extensive training will be provided to activists and members across the country using the New Union's national and regional office locations in Dublin, Sligo, Galway, Limerick, and Cork. All staff will transfer on their current terms and conditions with their current work allocations. The general secretary functions/responsibilities will be shared between the three general secretaries who, along with the IMPACT deputy general secretary, will manage the transition of the three unions' operations and the development of new services to members.

The CPSU and PSEU deputy general secretaries, along with the IMPACT national secretary, will be responsible for the provision of services to the three unions' sections in a new civil service organisation..

7. Subscriptions

Arrangements for existing members of the three unions will not change. New members will pay €370 a year or 0.8% of gross salary if less than that figure. (New members in the civil service clerical officer grade and related departmental grades will continue to pay 1% of gross salary in order to maintain the CPSU benefit scheme for those members).

Subscription income will be allocated to a general fund (92%) to cover the running costs and member services, an already healthy dispute fund (5%) and a developing world fund (3%). Branches will receive 10% from the general fund, plus a capitation payment to fund running costs, or they may opt to continue with existing pre-amalgamation arrangements if they wish.

8. Union branches

All existing branches transfer as they are. Existing head office services to them will continue but because of the additional staff and assets available additional supports and resources will be rolled out. Specifically:

- Your branch will not change
- Your head office official and national representatives will continue to support your branch as before, but extra resources will be forthcoming
- The process of selecting your local reps and candidates for elected office will not change
- Your branch AGMs and meetings will not change
- Negotiations locally with management will not change – your local reps will be there for you as normal if the amalgamation goes ahead
- National industrial committees for certain employments (CPSU) will not change
- Because all grades will be in the one union new opportunities for greater co-operation between grades and sections will emerge overtime. This will be particularly evident should a section or grade pursue a course of industrial action. The new union means they will be able to utilise the industrial action procedures of the new union to win the support of their colleagues where in the past grades in the other unions not involved could not support their colleagues.

9. Personal and grade specific representation

Local representatives and officials will continue to provide advice and support to members in their branch as before. All three existing unions have experience of disputes between members. Where these arise, the practice has been to assign separate representation to the parties. This includes individual disputes and inter-grade disputes. This practice will be maintained in the New Union. The Civil Service, in particular, has a historical structure of grade specific unions – this is not the norm in most other workplaces in the public and private sectors.

10. Beyond the branch: A divisional structure

The New Union will have more than 80,000 members. A structure of six divisions has been designed and could be described as six autonomous units within one union. These will be called Civil Service (where the amalgamation will be most noticeable), Health & Welfare, Local Government, Education, Municipal Employees, and Services and Enterprises (semi and commercial semi state agencies and companies and private sector employments).

Each division or sector will have its own biennial conference. Each will have autonomy over all issues that are unique to that sector, and the right to put forward policies on broader union and social issues. Each division will have its own elected executive with powers to approve industrial action and elect its members on the overall National Executive Committee for the wider union.

Policies and decisions that are relevant to more than one division will be decided on by an all-union national biennial conference which will take place for the first time in May 2018. This will also elect five national officers, one from each of five divisions (Local Government and Municipal Employees will be combined for this election). Each division will be represented on the National Executive broadly proportionate to the membership strength of each division – Civil Service (6), Health & Welfare (6), Education (3), Local Government (3), Municipal employees (2) and Service & Enterprise (3).

For the first six years of transition there will be special additional representative arrangements for the Civil Service and Services and Enterprises divisions as these are most directly affected by the amalgamation.

The Instrument of Amalgamation sets out all these transitional arrangements in detail and provides for a review of the transitional arrangements and the operation of the amalgamation including referral to an external independent mediator/arbitrator.

11. Civil Service

Three elected officers – one from each of three constituencies (CPSU, IMPACT and PSEU) will head up the division. They will be elected at the first Divisional Conference in April 2018. Ten ordinary members each will be elected at conference from the CPSU and the PSEU constituencies and six from IMPACT. Delegates to the conference will be nominated by each civil service branch according to their own procedures at their AGMs on a delegate ratio based on their branch membership.

12. Services and Enterprises

There will be two officers elected at the first conference of the division in April 2018. Four additional ordinary members' seats have been agreed to provide representation for representatives from the CPSU and PSEU branches, bringing the total number of ordinary seats for election to 17.

13. Grade representation

A new cross-division grade representative structure will be introduced to bring members in the same grades together to advance their interests on issues like pay and working conditions. This equivalent/professional grade structure will bring thousands of members doing the same or similar work in different divisions together. For example, the civil service clerical officer grade and the health/local government/education grade III, or the executive officer/higher executive officer grade and the public service grades IV to VII.

14. Recruitment and organisation

The New Union will build on the success of the organising model used in IMPACT and other larger unions extending the culture of encouraging greater participation by new and younger members at branch and workplace level. The success of the New Union will be rooted in the building of stronger and more powerful workplace activity through training, recruitment and campaigning at local level. The use of organisers, trained specifically to resource and encourage local activists, will be expanded across the divisions of the New Union.

15. Stability in transition

This proposed amalgamation will be a historic development in Irish trade union history. It will bring great challenges for the three unions and their members. The negotiators have endeavoured to devise an organisation structure that reflects the best of each of the unions. The transitional arrangements provide that there cannot be changes to the rules of the New Union with less than a 75% majority until 2024 in order to ensure all parties that their interests and status are protected within the new organisation. The norm of a two-thirds majority vote at National Conference will apply then.

