

Major local bargaining claim submitted under public service deal

## **ANDY PRENDERGAST**

### **Up to 30,000 clerical officers are encompassed by the first major local bargaining claim, submitted by Fórsa, under the 2024-2026 Public Service Agreement.**

Fórsa has lodged the first local bargaining claim of the Public Service Agreement (PSA) covering clerical officers, in grade 3 roles and related grades. The claim relates to clerical officers (COs) across multiple departments, covering up to 30,000 people – most of whom are members of Fórsa.

Local bargaining was re-introduced in the public and civil service under the current Public Service Agreement which runs to 2026. Under the PSA, unions can submit claims in respect of collective issues specific to “a grade, group or category”.

The value of a local bargaining claim during the term of the current Agreement is up to 1% but there is another 2% local bargaining fund, stipulated in the PSA, that is to be applied as part of a successor deal to the current Agreement.

The local bargaining feature is a key development in the chain of public service agreements, as it can facilitate a way to address pressure points across public services, beyond the general application of pay increases. It also allows for public and civil servants to have a more “hands on” role in negotiating improvements – more of a ‘bottom up’ than ‘top down’ approach.

The new claim submitted by Fórsa to DPER was developed through a survey of the union’s members, seeking how they would like to make use of the local bargaining fund.

The length of the CO pay scale has been raised before as an issue for clerical officers; there are 16 points on the Civil Service CO pay scale, while other grades have fewer points.

## **FOUR-POINT CLAIM**

The four parts to the claim are:

- Removal of Point 6 of the Clerical Officer scales (on completion of 1 year at point 5, the next point of progression is point 7).
- Removal of Point 11 of the Clerical Officer scales (on completion of 1 year at point 10, the next point of progression is point 12).
- Removal of the 3 years waiting criteria for access to Long Service Increments on the Clerical Officer scales.
- An increase of 3.5% to the absolute maximum points of the Clerical Officer Scales.

The claim covers Civil Service division clerical officers and temporary clerical officers; clerical workers in Education and Training Boards and the Higher Education sector, as clerical officers, Grade III roles, and library assistant posts; admin assistants, clerical officers, in Grade III roles and telephonists in the union’s Health & Welfare division; clerical officers, in Grade III roles, and library assistants in the union’s Local Government division; and admin assistants, clerical officers, in Grade II roles, library assistants, science & arts attendants & visitor security officers in the Services & Enterprises Division.

Éamonn Donnelly, Fórsa Deputy General Secretary and head of the civil service division, said: “We believe this claim is reasonable and constructive, however if the official response does not share that view, we will need members’ full support to make sure we can pursue the claim vigorously.”

Mr Donnelly also noted that another claim is in development for grades 4 to 7, who are executive officers, administrative officers, and higher executive officers.